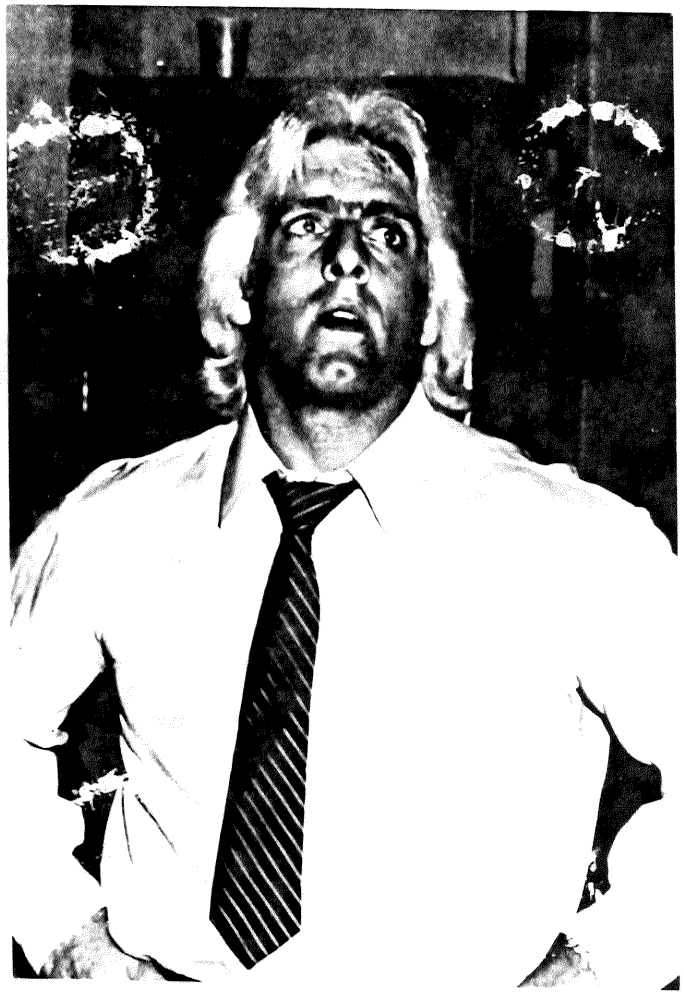
THE PRO WRESTLING *TORCH*



ANNUAL

1988

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INTRODUCTION

Well, here it is. The inaugural Pro Wrestling Torch Annual is finally complete. I can't tell you how happy I am with the way it turned out. Not totally because of my efforts, but because of the support that everyone gave me. From the staff, to the readers, to editors of other bulletins, everyone pitched in and gave 110 percent.

This is the first time I ever tried to put together anything of this proportion. It ended up being a little over 40 pages which when considering the print reduction, is equal to about 80 pages of information. I really didn't start it until late June or early July, so to say the least, I've been very busy the last several weeks. I did originally project that this would be out in Mid-July, but if all goes well from here, you should have gotten it in early August. I actually didn't get several contributions until very late in July. However, I did include five photos instead of four (as advertised), so that should make up for the slight delay.

This is the last thing I'm typing, and it feels good that it is almost over. I had a really good time putting it together, but enough is enough! I somehow managed to put out the normal bi-weekly newsletter in addition to working on this. I can't say it's been a great time while doing this. The death of Bruiser Brody came as a shock, and was justifiably distracting for a while.

The The Pro Wrestling Torch Newsletter started publishing last October, in 1987. Since that time, I have made so many new friends it has made all the work definitely worth the effort. Brad Breitzman has been a big part of the bulletin since day one. Ray Whebbe came along a month or two later and has been just as big of a help. Others who deserve mention are Steve Gerber for his monthly video tape reviews. I continue to get compliments on that feature. Tracy Breeden deserves mention for his continued reports on the USA promotion, giving The Torch the best coverage of that growing area. Elyse Zois has entertained us with her unique outlook on wrestling with her many "Reader Rhetoric" features. I have got to thank Jon Gallagher for being the first one to ever plug The Torch. He and The Wrestling Forum is probably where most of the current readers heard about this bulletin. Thanks to everyone else who has ever plugged The Torch and/or the annual. If you think I forgot to mention you, you're wrong. I didn't forget you, you just don't deserve mention. Seriously, there are a lot more of you out there who have helped The Torch become as successful as it is, and I thank you!

Why a "yearbook" in the middle of the year, you ask? Well, at the end of the year, Dave Meltzer and Jon Gallagher put tons of work into their respective yearbooks, and I know there would be no need for yet another yearbook in January. It's right after the holidays, and most people don't have another five or ten bucks just laying around waiting to be spent on wrestling memorabilia. Two is plenty and three would "be a crowd". So thus is born The Pro Wrestling Torch Annual (I'm so spoiled. On this computer I can program various keys to print anything I want when I touch them, for instance: The Pro Wrestling Torch Newsletter... that took one push of a button. But I hate typing out The Pro Wrestling Torch Annual because there is no key for it. Enough of my problems.). The Annual (that's better) is not a "yearbook", but more of a special issue. It is meant to be a collection of interesting features, rather than a summary of the year. The mid-year awards are just to help all of us put a perspective on the first half, so we can look back and vote fairly come the end of the year.

Although The Twin Cities is dead as far as live wrestling goes, there sure are plenty of fans who enjoy writing. Mr. Mike at one time was very active in writing on wrestling (for The Wrestling Observer) a few years back. His work is unique and often is called the highlight of Meltzer's yearbooks. I was lucky enough to get this fellow Minnesotan to put his talents to use in wrestling twice a year. His contribution really adds to this publication. He also recently had a feature in The Pro Wrestling Torch Newsletter, and if enough of you write in, I may be able to persuade him to make it a monthly effort. It's really up to you. By the way, he loves compliments on his work, so don't be shy.

Another fellow Minnesotan is Mick Karch who helped me put together a "Best of The Lean Mean Machine" feature. His writing is tremendous and gives a nostalgic look back on Twin Cities wrestling and professional wrestling in general.

Before I forget, I would like to thank Marty at Insty Prints for putting together the headings (i.e. "INTRODUCTION" on the top of this page.) for me on his computer. It really sets off the columns.

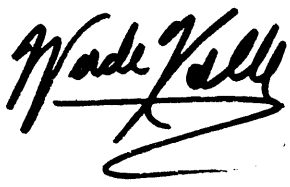
Throughout the newsletter as fillers I used old and new "Wrestling Images" and "Quotebooks". I hope you find them enjoyable.

The Annual just wouldn't have been the same without the help of you, the readers, whose joint effort put together "If I Were Booker", "All-Time Favorites", and the mid-year balloting. Your involvement was phenomenal and you deserve a lot of credit. Thank you!

A lot of you are seeing The Torch for the first time. I can only encourage you, if you haven't already, to subscribe to the bi-weekly bulletin for $1.25 per issue. See the previous page for more info.

I had an empty page, so as an added "bonus" I included my mid-year picks. I ran out of room at the end, and just listed my picks with no commentary.

On that note, with no more delay, let's move right along, without hesitations, or further ado, let's jump on the bandwagon, and continue to read, on the double, don't stop for a break... read on and enjoy the first ever Pro Wrestling Torch Annual. Be sure to let me know what you think. Your input and reaction is what really makes this worth doing. Talk to you soon in the next The Pro Wrestling Torch Newsletter... Thanks for reading! ***



THE TORCH'S MID-YEAR PICKS

When the end of the year comes around, there are numerous polls for year-end awards. Probably the most respected poll is The Wrestling Observer's year-end awards. But many other publications do year-end polls also, including Wrestling Forum, Pro Wrestling Illustrated and starting this year, The Pro Wrestling Torch Newsletter.

One thing mentioned very often is that the angles and achievements near the end of the year have a great advantage over those in the first half. No doubt it is harder to remember back nine or ten months to a match or an angle than it is to look back only a few weeks or months. That brings us to the purpose of this poll, The Torch's Mid-Year Awards. When the end of the year does come around, this feature will help all of us put a perspective on the first six months of the year, so we can judge the year-end awards much more fairly. The purpose of the ballot was not to predict who would win a respective award. The purpose was to produce a list of "leading candidates" as of June.

The Torch's ballot contains sixteen categories. Forty-five ballots were cast. Ten points were awarded to a first place vote, five for a second, three for a third, and one point for a fourth place vote. The points were distributed that way because most I discussed it with felt that the first place vote should weigh much heavier than a second, and that a second should weigh much heavier than a third and so on. A simple one point difference would not accurately project the voters feelings (i.e. Four points for first, three for second, two for third, and one for fourth). So, on that note, let's go on to the first annual Pro Wrestling Torch Mid-Year Awards!...

WRESTLER OF THE MID YEAR

1. **RANDY SAVAGE** (192 pts./11 first): Randy Savage gets first place in this category in the closest battle of all sixteen awards. He edged out the second place winner by only four points. Randy Savage started the year as a contender in the WWF. He was expected to defeat Honkeytonk Man for the Intercontinental Title during February's prime time "Main Event" show. Apparently HTM refused to "do the job", so Randy was without a title. Fortunately, Hulk Hogan had to take a leave of absence this summer, and Randy Savage was chosen to be the next WWF World Champion. He has been feuding with Ted DiBiase ever since winning the most recognized title in the business during Wrestlemania Four. This award should go to the man who has had good matches and a great positive impact on Pro Wrestling. Savage has had great matches with DiBiase and has single-handedly proven that the WWF and pro wrestling can and will survive without Hulk Hogan. He has certainly projected himself in a positive manner, and does not insult the intelligence of wrestling fans. Yes, as of June, Randy Savage is the leading candidate for Wrestler of the Year honors.

2. **RIC FLAIR** (188 pts./13 first): Ric Flair has come in a very solid second place. One more first place vote would have made him "Wrestler of the Mid-Year". Ric Flair has continued to impress most with his workrate, along with his interviews and charisma. In 1988 he has toned down the sexual motifs, and become a more respectable wrestler. He has had great matches with Sting and can have a good match with virtually anyone. Ric Flair may pull out a victory this year, but he will need to change his repetitive routine in his matches. A babyface turn would probably assure a strong year-end finish.

3. **TED DIBIASE** (131 pts./6 first): Many have predicted that Ted DiBiase would be a sure fire victor for Wrestler of the Mid-Year. He has almost single-handedly made a WWF card worth going to. He continues to keep one of the greatest gimmicks of all time, "The Million Dollar Man", fresh. He does fantastic interviews and plays his respective part better than anyone.

4. **OWEN HART** (51 pts./ 4 first): In a distant fourth place is the most exciting young star of the eighties, Owen Hart. He is someone who will be wrestler of the year many times in the future, but at this point, limited exposure along with his youth in the business seems to be enough to hold him back this year. He has some of the most exciting matches in the business and deserves to be a contender for this award.

Rounding out the top ten include (in order as always): Barry Windham, Sting, Lex Luger, Curt Hennig, Jerry Lawler, and Eddie Gilbert.

TAG TEAM OF THE MID-YEAR

1. **THE FANTASTICS** (240 pts./17 first): On the merits of great matches, these guys are the winners. Tommy Rogers and Bobby Fulton picked up where The Rock and Roll Express left off in the NWA. The Fantastics had a challenge. That was to "get over" without being accused of being cheap imitations of The Rock and Roll Express. They had to avoid the comparisons by impressing everyone with their work in the ring. That they did, and they immediately got over. Their matches with The Sheepherders and most notably The Midnight Express have produced the greatest matches of the year so far. The Fantastics will have to have a fresh feud, however, to keep their momentum going. The rumored heel turn of The Rock and Roll Express may be the new feud they need.

2. **THE MIDNIGHT EXPRESS** (162 pts./7 first): "Sweet" Stan and "Beautiful" Bobby comprise the most consistently high rated team of the late eighties. They are no doubt partly responsible for the success of The Fantastics. The great matches they have had with The Fantastics not only made themselves look good, but also made The Fantastics look good. Jim Cornette certainly has to be mentioned, as he adds the needed color to this team to make them one of the top two or three all around teams of the eighties. The Midnight Express have consistently been named tag team of the year by not only insider newsletters, but also the "mark mags". A rumored turn to babyface may make or break them this year. A Tully Blanchard/Arn Anderson-Midnight feud would prove to be as interesting as The Fantastics-Midnight Feud. Look for them to be a top contender at the end of the year for tag team of the year.

3. **TULLY BLANCHARD & ARN ANDERSON** (106 pts./5 first): This duo from the Four Horsemen are considered by many as the greatest team today. They have great matches consistently and take some of the best bumps in the business. Blanchard, and especially Anderson, give great intense interviews. The thing holding this team back is the fact that they are stale. The Four Horsemen gig, along with the same interviews, the same selling, and the same opponents, have made these two far from the most enjoyable team. A change is needed more for this team than any team in the US, and if Dusty is booker throughout the year, don't look for Tully and Arn to finish any higher than third at the end of the year. However, they are a great, solid team, and finish a solid third in the mid-year balloting.

4. **BADD COMPANY**(60 pts./3 first): Paul Diamond and Pat Tanaka have gone from colorless mid-card guys for Memphis into a great non-talking Midnight Express type tag team. They entered the AWA and along with Curt Hennig, were the highlight of that organization thus far this year. They have had great matches with The Rock & Roll Express, The Midnight Rockers, and most recently The Guerreros. Pat Tanaka is one of the top two or three small workers in the US and Paul Diamond is a solid tag team worker. Their sling-shot DDT has made them famous. Look for big things in the future out of these two young superstars.

Rounding out the top ten are The Road Warriors, The Islanders, Bad Company, The

Fabulous Rougeaus, The Guerreros, and Strike Force.

ROOKIE OF THE MID-YEAR

1. **RICKY RICE** (121 pts./10 first): "Are there any?". "Name one!". "I can't think of anyone." Those were the most common answers. As bad as Ricky Rice may be, apparently a combination of his ESPN exposure, lack of other contenders, and possible potential made him come out as the rookie of the mid-year. A Sharkey grad, and former PWA Champion, he entered his first "major" league this year in the form of the AWA. He wrestled as a singles, as a partner to Derrick Dukes, and finally settled in a tag team with John Paul DeMann. If he continues to improve, turning into a decent worker, he may capture the 1988 Rookie of the Year award.

2. **DERRICK DUKES** (90 pts./7 first): He's been called "the black Owen Hart". Derrick probably has more raw potential than any rookie this year. He is also a Sharkey grad and former partner of Ricky Rice. He has had only limited exposure on ESPN and seems to be being held back by the AWA. When given a chance, his desire will turn him into one of the top stars in the business. With ample exposure, he will give Ricky Rice a run for his money for the year end award.

3. **MAX PAIN**: This new guy from Memphis has had limited press. He is a former CWA champion, but is not known for his wide repertoire of moves. He is a guy with a lot of raw potential, and like many, will have the chance to form his style in Memphis. He is a viable contender for rookie of the year. (30 pts./2 first)

4. **SCOTT STEINER** (29 pts./2 first): The younger brother of Rick Steiner is also starting to make a name for himself in Memphis. He recently won the CWA Renegade Rampage Tournament and is a former Southern Tag Team Champion with Billy Travis. Some have said he would be the perfect addition to The Varsity Club. Keep an eye on this rookie.

Rounding out the top (and bottom) ten are: Rikki Nelson, Tom Cairo, The Mighty Wilbur, Todd Morton, Brian Adams, and Solomon Grundy.

PROMOTION OF THE MID-YEAR

1. **THE NATIONAL WRESTLING ALLIANCE (NWA)** (222 pts./first 15): Notwithstanding Dusty Rhodes' egotistical and often stale booking, the NWA somehow managed to pull out a first place vote. The NWA has produced some great events and fabulous matches so far this year. "Everyone likes the underdog", and the NWA is fighting to be number one, trying to knock Titan off the pedestal. When people think of a major league with talent and action, the NWA is the league that is brought up. With a possible Ted Turner buy-out, anything could happen in the second half of the year.

2. **THE WORLD WRESTLING FEDERATION (WWF)** (135 pts./8 first): The WWF gets the insider fans' votes not because of great cards and action packed matches, but because it is by far the most professionally run promotion in pro wrestling. Their TV shows and special events are visually first class, and they are considered by the mainstream community as the top, if not the only, league around. With more matches like DiBiase-Savage, the WWF may continue to be an exciting league.

3. **MEMPHIS (CWA)** (107 pts./ 4 first): Probably the best-run small circuit over the past several years continues to get credit as an exciting area. Assuming The Stud's Stable doesn't continue to dominate the programs, Memphis will be in the top three or four at the end of the year.

4. **CONTINENTAL WRESTLING FEDERATION (CWF/CCW)** (73 pts./ 5 first): Eddie Gilbert walked in to this promotion and turned it into one of the hottest promotions of the year. His booking immediately made this a highly talked about area. Crowds picked up, right along with the action. If the upward trend continues, look for the CWF to be a contender for the number one spot in Promotion of the Year balloting.

Rounding out the top ten vote getters are: Calgary Stampede, WCWA, AWA, USA, Owen's PNW, Sharkey's PWA.

MATCH OF THE MID-YEAR

1. **RIC FLAIR vs. STING on 3-27** (201 pts./ 15 first): This 45 minute draw, despite the post-match joke decision, was good enough to win the match of the mid-year award. Ric Flair was at his best, and Sting surprised many with his stamina and work rate. Sting proved that he is destined to be one of the future superstars. This match was also the main event for the Clash of the Champions card that was meant to deflate the success of Wrestlemania Four. This match showed the difference in work rate between the two organizations. This one will be tough to top.

2. **THE FANTASTICS vs. THE MIDNIGHT EXPRESS on 3-27** (134 pts/ 11 first): This match would have run away with a victory if this match didn't have to split its votes with the participating teams' other great matches. The top two teams in the US right now should have great matches, and they have. Their Clash of the Champions match had a fabulous blend of out-of-ring brawling and in-ring action.

3. **THE FANTASTICS vs. THE MIDNIGHT EXPRESS on 4-26** (49 pts./ 3 first): This was the match that saw The Fantastics defeat The Midnight Express for the NWA US Tag Team Titles. It aired on NWA Pro Wrestling. It was strong enough to pull off a third place finish.

4. **RANDY SAVAGE vs. TED DIBIASE from Saturday Night's Main Event shown on 3-12** (44 pts./ 3 first): Coming in fourth is one of the first battles between these two top ten wrestlers. This was before Wrestlemania and forshadowed a feud to come. It saw Randy Savage counted out of the ring after interference by Andre and Virgil. Elizabeth, in turn, brought out Hulk Hogan to make yet another save.

Rounding out the top ten is Hennig-Lawler (Title Change), Savage-DiBiase (3-27), Blanchard/Anderson-Windham/Luger (3-27), Hayes-Gordy Triple Dome of Terror (Parade of Champions), Fantastics-Midnight (45 minute debut), Flair-Hawk (1-24).

MANAGER OF THE MID-YEAR

1. **JIM CORNETTE** (264 pts./ 20 first): Jim Cornette continues to entertain and play up the part of a manager to its fullest. What more can be said about this guy that hasn't been said before. His performance at The Great American Bash was fabulous. He is the best in the field.

2. **PAUL E. DANGEROUSLY** (179 pts./ 8 first): There is little doubt that the top two managers in the business today are the top two vote getters in this ballot. Jim Cornette won by a considerable margin, but no one is even close to second place. Paul E. has had a lot of exposure through the AWA, Pro Wrestling This Week, and many independent circuits. He is fabulous and his spontaneous sense of humor will make him a top manager for many years to come. It won't take much to allow him to edge out Cornette at the end of the year.

3. **JAMES J. DILLON** (65 pts./ 4 first): He plays the straight man better than anyone. His managing of The Four Horsemen gives him exposure. However, he is not funny (nor does he

try to be), and often puts the WTBS studio audience to sleep. However, he plays his part well, and well enough to wrap up third place.

4. **BOBBY HEENAN** (51 pts./ 0 first): Heenan continues to be the top manager in the WWF and still does a fantastic job. He received no first place votes, but that means a lot of people felt he wasn't best, but deserved mention.

Rounding out the top ten are: Downtown Bruno, Paul Ellering, Brother Ernest Angel, Slick, Kevin Sullivan, and Jimmy Hart.

ANNOUNCER OF THE MID-YEAR

1. **JESSE VENTURA** (227 pts./ 8 first): Although better defined as a color commentator, it says a lot that he beat out all of the professionally trained announcers to pull out a first place finish. He continues to make the WWF programs bearable on its worst days. His wit and humor is enough to make him the best in the business.

2. **JIM ROSS** (181 pts./ 8 first): The most professional announcer who has a way of legitimizing wrestling, and making a good match seem great gets the nod for second place. Although he over uses the phrases such as "Things are breaking loose here" and "Physical", he is definitely one of the finest play by play announcers ever. If this category was split in two, he would have won announcer of the year honors.

3. **TONY SHIAVONE** (138 pts./ 6 first): Shiavone is the NWA's anchor announcer and does a fine job. His play by play is top notch and he hosts the NWA's programs well. He deserves a lot of votes just because he has to play off of David Crockett's inane commentary.

4. **LANCE RUSSELL** (108 pts./ 3 first): This Memphis mainstay plays his part to perfection. His quotes are fabulous: "That Missy, her next thought will be her first thought." His casual style of announcing during the studio show and his way of not talking down to the fans is great.

And to round out the top ten... Gordon Solie, Ed Whalen, Bobby Heenan, Vince McMahon, Gorilla Monsoon, and Marc Lowrance.

FEUD OF THE MID-YEAR

1. **RANDY SAVAGE-TED DIBIASE** (190 pts./ 9 first): Their feud has electrified the WWF and is drawing very well on cards without Hulk Hogan, something Titan hasn't been able to do for years. These two top workers are producing some classic matches, including the recent (post-mid-year) bout at Madison Square Garden in a cage. Their feud has been able to last several months without getting stale and their matches get tremendous heat throughout.

2. **FANTASTICS-MIDNIGHT EXPRESS** (148 pts./ 11 first): These two teams had the match of the mid-year runner-up. All of their matches have been great, and the humor Jim Cornette added to their battles makes this a viable contender for feud of the mid-year. Unlike the wrestler of the mid-year, this category is more apt to change when the end of the year comes around. So many new feuds will be produced in the next six months that it will take a good memory for any of these feuds to make number one at the end of the year.

3. **FLAIR-STING** (47 pts./ 2 first): This was a surprise during the first six months. Sting rose out of almost no where to become the hottest wrestler in the business. These matches headlined cards for months and drew very well. It definitely deserves mention.

4. **CURT HENNIG-JERRY LAWLER** (34 pts./ 1 first): This is a feud that lit up Memphis for the first time since the Lawler-Idol/Rich feud. They had some very good matches, including the title change to Lawler. This feud has had some very interesting angles and has drawn well in Memphis.

Rounding out the top ten are the following: Gilbert-Lawler, Roberts-Rude, Luger-Horsemen, Freebirds-Freebirds, Hogan-DiBiase, and Sullivan-Garvin.

ANGLE/PUSH/GIMMICK OF THE MID-YEAR

1. **THE WINDHAM TURN** (144 pts./ 11 first): This turn came out of nowhere. Barry and Lex were a hot team and were expected to hold the NWA Tag Team Titles for a long time. A last second change in plans saw Windham turn and join The Four Horsemen. He went on to be the best new heel of the mid-year. The actual in-ring turn was done to perfection as Barry caused the pin of his own partner and the loss of his own title.

2. **THE TWIN REFEREE ANGLE** (48 pts./ 3 first): This angle went nowhere after it happened, but the surprise of when it happened makes it come in a distant second. Dave and Earl Hebner played the angle well. When the evil twin counted Hulk Hogan's shoulders down for a three-count for the first time in many years, the shock waves in the arena were tremendous. When Hulk threw the evil ref on top of Virgil, it was a thing of beauty. The angle won't win angle of the year because it went nowhere after its first night, but deserves mention.

3. **THE TRIPLE DOME OF TERROR/ TRIPLE TOWER OF DOOM GIMMICK** (47 pts./ 3 first): This is by far the most original gimmick match since tag team wrestling was invented. It did not produce great matches early on, but it was original enough to gain many votes. As the kinks are worked out of it, as in the NWA's version, it should improve into a great gimmick match.

4. **ANGLE WHERE HOGAN LOSES BELT** (34 pts./ 2 first): The actual push leading to the network match with Andre versus Hulk along with the fact that the belt was held up makes this a fourth place finisher for angle of the mid-year. Andre winning the belt, followed by Ted DiBiase buying it, followed by the title being held up, and then a tournament made to decide a champion was a string of major events this year, ending the "Hogan era".

Rounding out the top ten are: Lawler-Gilbert fire throwing & car windshield angle, The Varsity Club gimmick, The Tom Pritchard-Dirty White Girl & Boy Angle, Brother Ernest Angel Gimmick, Roberts-Rude-Cheryl Angle, and The Hennig-Lawler Set Destruction Angle.

MOST IMPROVED WRESTLER OF THE MID-YEAR

1. **STING** (121 pts./ 9 first): Sting has risen out of almost nowhere to become the hottest star in the NWA. He has turned into a major drawing card and a great wrestler in the ring. His interviews are fun and he has a great following. The improvement is very visible when looking back at when he first turned a little over a year ago. If he continues to improve and stays hot, he will win this award at the end of the year.

2. **LEX LUGER** (91 pts./ 7 first): This guy couldn't have a good match or put together one sentence just a year ago. He has continued to improve this year and is justifiably a main event wrestler. His interviews are still improving. His turn to babyface has also rejuvenated his career.

3. **BRET HART** (43 pts./ 3 first): He continues to be the master of execution but has been in the spotlight since his semi-turn during Wrestlemania Four. He has had a good feud with Bad News Brown.

4. **BARRY WINDHAM** (37 pts./ 3 first): Although his skill and work rate would be virtually impossible to improve, his charisma and out-of-ring style could, and did improve this year. His heel turn won angle of the mid-year, and his interviews and enthusiasm seem to have jumped upward.

Rounding out the top ten are: Curt Hennig, Don Muraco, Randy Savage, The Ultimate Warrior, Paul "The Avalanche" Neu, and Owen Hart.

MOST DEPROVED WRESTLER OF THE MID-YEAR

1. **NIKITA KOLOFF** (100 pts./ 8 first): He used to have an intimidating look that made up for his laziness and total lack of ability. Size sometimes is all it takes to be a superstar. Nikita has now lost all the bulk he once had and is nearing a point where he will slip out of his wrestling outfit. Not only does he now wrestle terribly, but he also looks terrible.

2. **BAM BAM BIGELOW** (47 pts./ 1 first): The reason most stated by the voters for their vote was his terrible push. Six months ago he had the potential to be one of the all-time greatest big men gimmick wrestlers. His tattoos and acrobats made him one of a kind. Unfortunately, as his push diminished, so did his desire to work. Add to that a bad knee, and he certainly deserves this honor. Hopefully he can turn his career around soon.

3. **DUSTY RHODES** (46 pts./ 3 first): Dusty just couldn't keep himself out of some negative category. He made this category somehow, but he is still just as bad as before, but apparently the readers felt he has gotten even worse. That's a scary thought.

4. **HACKSAW DUGGAN** (41 pts./ 3 first): Although it's been a few years since he was a good worker, 1988 has been the worst yet. He has gone from a good brawler to one of the worst performers in wrestling.

Rounding out the top ten are: Steve Williams, The Ultimate Warrior, Hulk Hogan, The Road Warriors, Butch Reed, and Andre the Giant.

TELEVISION SHOW OF THE MID-YEAR

1. **NWA MAIN EVENT** (112 pts./ 6 first): The new kid on the block wins TV show of the mid-year. The NWA picked up on the WWF's Saturday Night's Main Event concept and put together a weekly Main Event show of their own. Although it is often pre-empted, the shows that have been on at the regular time are consistently worth watching. It's not a perfect program yet, but the concept is enough for it to earn first place.

2. **CWA MEMPHIS FNN/SCORE** (87 pts./ 5 first): Memphis' first real nation-wide exposure on cable seems to have impressed most. The great angles, announcing, and action, along with the FNN/Score Match of the Week were enough to give CWA a strong finish.

3. **WWF SUPERSTARS** (68 pts./ 4 first): It is so professionally done, and so organized that it deserves to be near the top of the list for TV shows. It is the WWF's "A-Show" where all of the major angles are discussed or seen first. The matches aren't great, but it promotes the product better than any other show.

4. **CWF WRESTLING** (52 pts./ 2 first): Continental Championship Wrestling changed to The Continental Wrestling Federation, the CWF got a new booker in the form of Eddie Gilbert, and they got a spot on FNN/Score. All of this combined to make one of the best shows around.

Rounding out the top ten are: NWA TBS Saturday, Clash of the Champions, Calgary Stampede Wrestling, Saturday Night's Main Event, NWA World Wide Wrestling, and AWA Championship on ESPN.

BABYFACE OF THE MID-YEAR

1. **RANDY SAVAGE** (193 pts./ 12 first): Randy Savage has taken the WWF World Title and instead of being a semi-popular champion who follows the Hogan era, he has been a great champion when it comes to playing the babyface role. He is still "The Macho Man" while still getting sympathy from the mainstream fans when he gets beat up by Andre, Virgil and DiBiase. Savage is playing the babyface role to perfection and it shows at the arenas by the fans reaction to him.

2. **STING** (158 pts./ 8 first): Sting has gone from a mediocre heel to the hottest babyface in the NWA. He owns the fans in the arenas and really seems to relate to the crowd. He knows how to work the crowd and has the charisma to back it up. Sting deserves a high finish in this category.

3. **LEX LUGER** (103 pts./ 5 first): Lex has gotten the push in the NWA as if he was the number-one babyface. He has really tried to fulfill the NWA's expectations, and after seeing The Baltimore Bash and the fans' excitement when he had apparently won the NWA World Title, it has worked. He will continue to be top babyface in the business.

4. **HULK HOGAN** (77 pts./ 7 first): How can any category concerning best babyface not include the most popular wrestler of the eighties. His inactivity has caused a drop in votes, but the time he was wrestling in the first half of the year was the center of attention, and he did main event the first prime time network show in years.

Rounding out the top ten are: The Fantastics, Jerry Lawler, Don Muraco, Bret Hart, Owen Hart, and Jimmy Garvin.

BEST HEEL OF THE MID-YEAR

1. **TED DIBIASE** (177 pts./ 11 first): The man who led to Hogan losing the WWF Title has to be considered heel of the mid-year. He continued to feud with Randy Savage, and because the fans hate Ted so much, Savage is assured of more cheers. DiBiase plays his respective part better than anyone else can or could do.

2. **BARRY WINDHAM** (142 pts./ 10 first): He has gone from a mediocre babyface to being the best heel in the NWA. He is so arrogant and confident that he makes Ric Flair look modest. Barry is the guy who will probably make a Flair turn possible.

3. **RIC FLAIR** (84 pts./ 5 first): He is the most popular heel in all of wrestling. He is cheered so much, one might think he isn't a good heel. Really though, his image is played out so well, some take to it and appreciate him for the great athlete he is. Ric Flair could make a top babyface, but until that day comes, no one will stop Flair from being a top heel.

4. **TERRY TAYLOR** (65 pts./ 2 first): He plays the smart-ass wrestler and he does it very well. He is the ultimate heel in reality. He acts so innocent, but when "his friends'" backs are turned, he turns on them. In any case, now that he is in Titan, hopefully he will get to do his full-fledged smart-ass routine in a major league atmosphere.

Rounding out the top ten are: Curt Hennig, Rick Rude, Eddie Gilbert, Kevin Sullivan, Makhan Singh, and Andre the Giant.

WORST WRESTLER OF THE MID-YEAR

1. **ANDRE THE GIANT** (86 pts./ 6 first): Not much needs to be said for this category. The in-ring performance speaks for itself. Andre is pitiful. His stamina is non-existent. His agility is non-existent. Any wrestling skills are invisible. Unfortunately, his ever increasing weight has made him the worst wrestler today.

2. **GEORGE "THE ANIMAL" STEELE** (84 pts./ 6 first): He has turned completely into a novelty with no wrestling ability at all. He doesn't even bother entering the ring for battle royals anymore.

3. **THE ULTIMATE WARRIOR** (77 pts./ 5 first): His stamina along with the numerous bad matches he's been in are enough to justify The Warrior as the worst wrestler. He is the only person to finish in the top ten of both Most Improved and Most Deproved. The jury's out on his potential (or lack there of) at this point.

4. **DUSTY RHODES** (59 pts./ 5 first): As far as in-the-ring ability goes, he is not the worst. His routine works and top rope cross body blocks show he possesses some skill. However, he places himself at the top of all the controversies, so his push versus his ability makes him appear to be the worst.

Rounding out the top ten are: The Junkyard Dog, Hulk Hogan, Nikita Koloff, Bugsy McGraw, Brutis Beefcake, and Ken Patera.

WORST PROMOTION OF THE MID-YEAR

1. **THE AMERICAN WRESTLING ASSOCIATION (AWA)** (211 pts./ 17 first): I don't know what it is, but the AWA comes off as the worst run of the major promotions. The AWA totally lacks any booking creativity. They are happy to sit back and let WWF and NWA flunkies wrestle for the AWA, and think that's enough to be "the major league of professional wrestling". They have talent. They have trouble keeping it though. The AWA is definitely on an upward trend, though, but who knows if that trend will not change directions tomorrow.

2. **THE WORLD WRESTLING FEDERATION (WWF)** (56 pts./ 4 first): In as many ways as this is the best promotion, it is also the worst. What other promotion has such ridiculous angles that we become ashamed to be fans. What league with do much talent has yet to put a great card together this year. Well, the WWF is the top promotion, but in many ways it's the worst.

3. **INTERCONTINENTAL WRESTLING AMERICA (IWA)** (51 pts./ 4 first): If more people would have seen this organization, they would agree it makes the AWA easy to like. Their announcing, their television show, their talent roster, their booking, their owners, their name. It all adds up to the worst joke of a promotion I've seen. It makes Deep South and California Championship look okay. Maybe I'm exaggerating, but it is bad. And the sad thing is there is little hope for the IWA.

4. **WORLD CLASS (WCWA)** (36 pts./ 2 first): This organization continues to improve, but again, the past is too difficult to forget. World Class is exciting to watch these days, and will probably drop from this category come the end of the year.

Rounding out the top ten are: GLOW/POWW, Central States (UWA), ICW, NWF, Bruiser Bedlam, and Tomko.

So there you have it. This concludes the first ever **Pro Wrestling Torch Mid-Year Awards.** When the end of the year comes around, you can look back at these awards so you remember who you voted for at mid-year. If you have any suggestions for the end of the year balloting, let me know. Also, let me know if you liked this format, or would like to see changes. This is my first go around in compiling ballots, and let me tell you it's time consuming! But the results made it worth it. Finally, a big thanks goes out to those of you who took the time to fill out a ballot and cast your votes in these categories. I thank you. ***

KARCH BRINGS WRESTLING JOURNALISM TO THE SCREEN

Mick Karch has indented himself into the Twin Cities wrestling scene. To his credit he's done it his way. Much like one of his role models, Bruiser Brody, the Mickster has done only what he wants, when he wants. He's done some wrestling, announcing, interviews, writing, photo shoots, and even suggested workable booking angles.

Now Karch is the host of Channel 23's wrestling block. Between clips of POWW, IWA, NWA, PWTW, and World Class Wrestling, Karch interviews local celebrities and gives his own commentary. The show has taken off and things have never looked better for him.

Being a wrestling announcer is possibly the hardest of all sports. You buck the conventional Ray Scott broadcasting which says, "The less you say, the better." In fact, wrestling commentators seem to say more per minute than any others. Problem is, much of what they say is nonsense.

Mick Karch is the exception. Without a doubt he's the Midwest's best announcer. He also has a lot to say. In this special Torch interview, you'll see what makes the PWA's 1987 announcer of the year tick.

Whebbe: How long have you been involved in wrestling?

Karch: I'd say over 20 years, Ray. I became an avid fan at age 9, did my first bulletin at 13, and from there I began to do freelance writing. In 1973, I began writing for the Daily American. I also headed the Nick Bockwinkel fan club and wrote for the Metropolitan Forum.

Whebbe: The Forum was great fun! I recall a time where you and I argued a bit about pro wrestling.

Karch: Yes, it was fun.

Whebbe: Do you have a journalism background?

Karch: I studied journalism in high school and at the University of Minnesota. But as far as wrestling goes, I'm a self taught writer. As far as announcing goes, Marty O'Neill was a role model. The little man with sunglasses was great!

Whebbe: You've also wrestled some.

Karch: Well, I don't know if you could call it that. Me and a bunch of friends used to wrestle in backyards. Our highlight was when the late, great Dennis Bockwinkel stole the ring for a day and let us use it. Dennis was an AWA rookie at the time and part of the ring crew. He had the ring truck at his home and set the ring up for us in Paul Pershman's backyard.

Whebbe: Pershman, now wrestling as Buddy Rose, was part of that group, then?

Karch: He sure was. I met Paul Pershman in the summer of 1971. We became friends through our mutual admiration of Nick Bockwinkel. Paul liked Nick so much that his softball team called him Paul Bockwinkel. I remember when Paul would wrestle with us wearing a ski mask in the summer. He weighed all of 165 pounds back then.

Whebbe: The Bockwinkel affiliation and friendship has really been a strong force in your life.

Karch: It has. Nick and his wife have sent me and mine baby gifts, wedding cards... the whole shot. Our friendship started on a fluke and grew. In November, 1970, I became a big fan of his. One night he was wrestling at the Minneapolis Auditorium and we put up a pro Nick banner. The ushers made us take it down though.

A few days later I saw Nick at the Calhoun Beach Club and told him about what happened. He listened, so on a whim I asked him if I could start a fan club for him.

Whebbe: And a successful one at that.

Karch: And Buddy Rose was part of it too. I'm proud of our work with Nick's fan club. In 1972, it won a journalism award and in 1977 we were named the fan club of the year. Nick was always cooperative, gracious, and supportive. I was personally saddened to see Nick leave the area. But from a financial point it was something he had to do.

Whebbe: Nick also gave you a lot of professional criticism of your announcing.

Karch: Sure he did. Nick always told me, "Remember, don't steal the show during interviews. Nobody will pay big money to see Mick Karch talk. It's the wrestlers who put fans in the seats." And he was right.

Whebbe: After many years working with the AWA, they finally hired you to do ring entries and some commentary in Vegas. Was that fun?

Karch: Sure it was, Ray. Working for Verne at the Showboat was fun and something I waited a long time for. I delt with Greg far more than I delt with Verne and he always treated me very well and with a lot of respect. It helped me get the exposure I needed and led me to my job at Channel 23.

Whebbe: Which is hosting a four hour wrestling block.

Karch: It's fun. The people at 23 are so professional and easy to work with. It is not in the contract necessarily, but they seem to give me some creative control. And my producer, Mary O'Neill, has said many times that she trusts my judgment. I'm free to be a journalist and never want to lose that. From a career standpoint it's the greatest thing I've ever done. I'm not singling out the AWA, though. However, there were times when I felt a lot of pressure and I really don't feel my best talents were utilized.

Whebbe: But as good as you are on 23, Mick, I think most fans have never seen your best stuff. Some of the announcing you did with the PWA was outstanding.

Karch: I appreciate that, and wish I had the opportunity to do more play by play or color.

Whebbe: You were a strong supporter of the PWA.

Karch: And all independents. At first I wasn't totally comfortable with the group. As many wrestling organizations are, the PWA was confused at times, but we always pulled it together and the camaraderie was, and is, special.

Whebbe: In the PWA you interviewed some BIG, scary guys. The Terminators, Andy Big Bear, Nord the Barbarian, and Larry "The Butcher" Cameron all had words with you. Was it ever scary?

Karch: I would have to answer that by quoting Nick Bockwinkel who once told me there's a fine line between repect and fear. I know my job, they know their job. Once you fear something, you've lost all control. Respecting these men and their talents, I don't feel I was ever treding on thin ice. But I know they respect me as a television announcer as well. Its the wrestler who has nothing to say that makes for a bad interview because then, in a sense, the annoucner has to put himself over and carry the interview for three minutes. The wrestlers that you mentioned took some of my pre-interview suyggestions to heart and it made for a workable finshed product.

Whebbe: Your interviews with Bruiser Brody from Winnipeg's West Four Alliance were truly classics. I'm glad you aired some of them on 23 because the fans have a right to see how good you can be.

Karch: Yes, Brody was a career highlight. He was so gracious before and after. It was something to see! And his energy level was incredible . I was fortunate to meet and interview Frank and he'll forever be missed in the wrestling world.

Whebbe: What is the one thing you wanted to do in wrestling but didn't.

Karch: I always wanted to do the ring entry for Nick Bockwinkel. While he was feuding with Curt (Hennig) in the AWA, I had the opportunity to, but the house mike went out. It was on August 1st, 1987 and it was my AWA debut. It had worked the whole night, but just before Nick's entrance, it went dead. I guess there was a higher power around that night.

Whebbe: You've used the word "journalist" several times. Doesn't journalism go against the grain of what most promotions want?

Karch: I guess. I see myself as a journalist and I know there is a large contingent of smart or insider viewers that I want to cater to. I'll never BS anyone or be disloyal to the fan who reads The Torch or The Observer within the limits of what a wrestling announcer can do. And being able to work at home at 23 makes it all the better.

Whebbe: How did you get the job at 23?

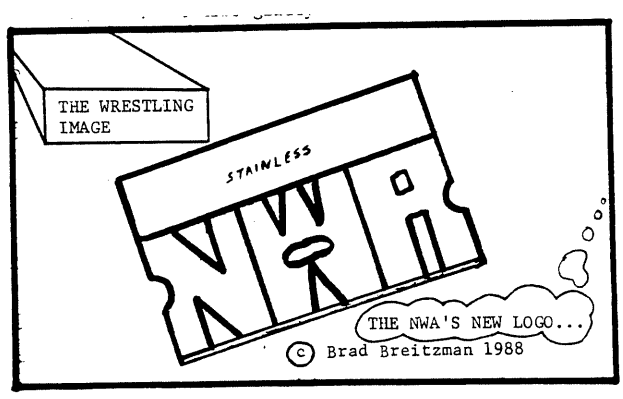
Karch: Actually Paul Dangerly helped me. Without his confidence, help, and support, I may have never gotten it.

Whebbe: Have you accepted the way wrestling's changed?

Karch: Sure. I've accepted that. Granted, I get nostalgic for the good ol' days, but they're gone forever. Because wrestling's changed, I have a job.

Whebbe: What about the future of Mick Karch?

Karch: I've paid my dues in wrestling and feel good about that. Working at home is great. I would be foolish, however, not to look at other career options, particularly related to wrestling. From a financial standpoint, I have to do what is in my best interest. Right now I am very happy at 23. I would like the show to expand and improve and hopefully I would be rewarded accordingly. I will soon be doing some commentary for Windy City Wrestling which will be fun. For now I will be content here, enjoy whatever fame I have locally, take potshots when needed and refuse to sellout. If I get opportunities outside of wrestling, I'll look, but for now I'm very happy with my work at Channel 23. ***



BEST OF THE LEAN MEAN MACHINE

I approached Mick Karch about doing a tribute to the now retired, Nick Bockwinkel several months ago. I figured that since Mick ran the Nick Bockwinkel Fan Club (The Bockwinkel Brigade) and published an accompanying newsletter, **The Lean Mean Machine**, for seventeen years, he would be the one to honor this living legend. Several weeks later he suggested that I take "the best of **The Lean Mean Machine**" instead and publish that in this Annual as a tribute to Bockwinkel. I had never seen a LMM, but agreed. After going through many issues of LMM, I found that the bulletin didn't center around Nick, but it was basically an entertaining, and informative newsletter. Both he and I have gone through several issues and picked out the following selections; some cruel, some humorous, and others nostalgic. It will conclude with a tribute to Bockwinkel by Mick Karch done several years ago before Nick's retirement. I'm sure you'll enjoy these features as much as I did...

THE BEST OF MICK KARCH'S LEAN MEAN MACHINE

Childhood Thrills

Now classified as a "free-lance" wrestling writer who periodically reaps monetary rewards for his literary efforts, I remember the first time I ever got paid for anything related to pro wrestling. I'll bet Wally Karbo will never, ever remember this, but when I was about 14, I hand-delivered some publicity for him to the **Minneapolis Tribune**, about a six-block walk at that time from the wrestling offices at the now defunct Dyckman Hotel. Wally gave me a handful of change. I was more thrilled with the chore itself and who I was doing it for than anything.

(SUMMER 82)

Some Payments Due Still

Speaking of writing and that garbage, those of you who recall my involvement with the ultra-conservative **Minneapolis Daily American** will also recall that I quit their ranks about five years ago when they pleaded financial trouble and wouldn't pay me about $30 or $35 for some wrestling columns.

You guessed it----it's all this time later and still, no payment. But then I guess I can't expect anything from a newspaper whose presses stop when the rat collapses chasing the cheese on the treadmill.

(SUMMER 82)

A Sign Of Things To Come?

He's worth a fortune now, but in the days when he was just thinking about getting into pro wrestling, Playboy Buddy Rose was over at my house and asked if he could have a piece of Velveeta cheese, with a glass of milk. Not one to be overly stingy (despite what rumors may abound), I told him to help himself.

No sooner did I turn my back than he had the entire two-pound cheese block unwrapped and was chomping on it, with a quart of milk that he was drinking right from the carton.

(SUMMER 82)

A Masterful Interviewer Too

I'll never forget how embarrassed I was the first time I met Buddy Wolff, at the TV studios. Wolff, one of my all-time favorites and one of the most underrated wrestlers ever, was in town to begin his partnership with Larry Heiniemi (Lars Anderson). I decided to interview Wolff for the **Minneapolis Daily American**.

He filled me in on his background in amateur athletics, primarily in collegiate football, where he had won numerous awards. After he listed all of these honors, yours truly, being so transfixed with interviewing him, came up with a brilliant question: "How about football? Have you won any awards?"

Wolfe turned eight shades of the rainbow and quipped, "I could have sworn I just told you about that!"

It took three days for the blush to leave my face.

(SUMMER 82)

A Critique of Backlund

It was interesting to catch Madison Square Garden wrestling, too, and see Bob Backlund in action for the first time since his AWA prelim days. I'm no more impressed with him than I was when he was here. He's boring and slow- moving. There is no way that he is in Nick Bockwinkel's league, in my estimation.

(SUMMER 80)

A Young Greg Gagne

Greg Gagne was on that Garden card, and facts are facts, whether you are a staunch Nick fan or not, Greg Gagne is a great wrestler. Though he was only in a preliminary bout out east, the action in his match with Jose Estrada equalled anything on the rest of the card, and the sell-out crowd of over 21,000 really enjoyed the bout. There aren't too many nights when a Greg Gagne match isn't exciting. He's getting better as he goes along and is a bonafide contender for anyone's championship.

(SUMMER 80)

The Average Mick Karch Fan

I've mentioned some of the various and sundry forms of lunatics that I've run across among the wrestling fans through the years. Well, I've got one more for you.

This one is affectionately referred to as "Crazy Mike". To begin with, he makes his money by selling bouquets of roses on the street corners in Downtown Minneapolis. That's a revealing clue already, isn't it? At any rate, if he spots me walking down the street, regardless of whether it is from three feet or three blocks, he first gets my attention by emitting a shrill, ear-piercing whistle. Then, he'll flail his arms wildly in the air, as if he's trying to direct a helicopter to its landing. To top it off, he shouts out his question about wrestling at the top of his lungs, not waiting until I have at least gotten next to him. You don't know how embarrassing it is to have some character bellow, "Did Wahoo finally get his head cut off!?" while you're trying to mind your own business and be unassuming. There must be an extra padded room for this clown.

(JUNE 83)

Everyone's Favorite Sheik

You'd think he'd recognize me by now, but apparently not. After a recent card in St. Paul, I approached Adnan El-Kaissie in the back locker room area, with the intent to show him a classic program I had from Texas, circa 1960. As I got near, he bellowed, "No, no, no! I don't sign autographs!" Normally, I won't get indignant, but I said, "Hey, I don't want your autograph. I just want to show you something."

To make a long story short, he was delighted at the program's content, but not so delighted that I wanted to keep it and not give it to him.

(JUNE 83)

Winter 1985: The State of Pro Wrestling In Minneapolis/St. Paul

One thing that I thought I would never do on the pages of "Lean Mean Machine" is address the issue of the promotional war. But in fact, it is a matter that can't really be ignored. It's everywhere you look, and it has changed the face of pro wrestling almost on a daily basis.

There are really three major impacts of what has happened over approximately the last two years: First and foremost is the jumping of wrestlers from one promotion to another. Second, the effect that the war has had on attendance in those cities where the competition is most fierce. Third, what has happened to wrestling itself as a result.

On the matter of the wrestlers jumping ship, I can't and won't go into that too deeply, because most of you know who has left what group and gone where, either due to money matters, promises of grandeur, disagreements with their promoters, blah, blah, blah. Some of those who have switched allegiance have done remarkably well. For others, it was a mistake of historic dimensions. I imagine you can liken it to trades in major league baseball. A pitcher may

win twenty games in one city, play out his option, sign for ten million with another team, and either have a few more outstanding seasons, or get shelled for six runs a game and have fans screaming, "Why the hell did we ever sign that guy?"

The effect that this head-to-head battle has had in many cities has been catastrophic for one promotion or another, and in some, like Minneapolis-St. Paul, for both. I can use the Twin Cities as an example where the invasion of the Whiff has had more than a profound impact on attendance. The New York group did very well in their first few cards here beginning in the summer of '84, and the AWA more than met the challenge. Then, suddenly, the AWA seemed to regain all of its lost momentum. The "new kid on the block" wasn't such a novelty anymore, and the fans turned out again in droves for the AWA. The only deviation was over Christmas holiday, when the AWA drew some 15,000 to St Paul, and the WWF came back just a few days later with a solid 11,000 of their own.

What has happened since then is no more dramatic, and more devastating to both. After Whiff's celebrated" "Wrestlemania" effort, and the AWA's "Starcage '85", the Twin Cities professional wrestling fans started staying away in a big way. New York wasn't all that different from what they had been doing aside from Wrestlemanias. Their overall attendance at the Met Sports center in Bloomington has probably averaged about 3,000 or so over the past year. The remarkable thing, and the sad thing, is that the AWA had sagged tremendously. It wasn't long ago where crowds upwards of 15,000 were the rule, not the exception, for matches at the Civic Center. But after "Star Cage", the AWA has been the one stung. As poorly as they draw, the Whiff won't pull out.

And stung by what? Stung by an over-saturation of the television wrestling market, stung by a misrepresentation to the media that wrestling has only been popular for the last two years, and only popular because of Vince McMahon's "marketing genius" and Hulk Hogan's "sudden" popularity, and force-feeding the fans that Cyndi Laupre and Mr. T actually have a place in the wrestling profession. As an AWA fan, I can only hope that everything falls back into place in the wrestling profession, that this production being foisted out East (Norman Lear would love it) runs its course and everything returns to a state of normalcy. With wedding receptions, cartoons, pie throwing, and other assorted gimmickry. I truly believe that while this technique may be a marketing boom and make mega-bucks for those involved in the short term, that in the long term, it is pro wrestling itself that is suffering. But does Vince really care?

As Verne Gagne has stated in the past, what New York has done is systematically dismantled the foundations of pro wrestling as we have known it. When the New York planes stop flying overhead, and their last bomb is dropped, let's hope there are enough salvageable pieces of the pro wrestling we have grown up with to put together again.

It's a stinking shame when the AWA has put on some truly blockbuster cards, loaded with outstanding talent, and the Civic Center has been a fourth full, when a card with Nick, Larry Z, Slaughter, The Warriors, The Freebirds, Stan Hansen, Martel, Greg Gagne, Blackwell, etc., does only slightly better than a card with Uncle Elmer, Cousin Junior, and Tony Garea.

It's obvious the Twin Cities fans, at least, have just about had their fill and the wrestling dollar isn't being spent anymore. I'm just sick about the fact that the wrong promotions is suffering its effects.

(WINTER 85)

Super Sunday And The Return Of Verne

Verne Gagne came out of retirement at the St. Paul Civic Center August 8th, teaming with Mad Dog Vachon against Jerry Blackwell and The Sheik. 18,000 fans jammed the building, and I want to tell you, they weren't disappointed. Unquestionably the most one-sided tag team match I've ever seen (until the Horsemen -Superpowers/Warriors series, right?... W.K.) Jerry and The Sheik had virtually no offense the entire match, as Verne and The Dog hammered them from pillar to post. Bottom line here is that Verne looked better than he has in years. He was very active in the match, throwing dropkicks and so forth, and had the crowd in an uproar. The ovation that he received was absolutely deafening. Say what you will about Verne Gagne, he's 56 years old and at least in the Minneapolis-St. Paul area, he's magic to the fans.

(FALL 82)

Mick's Mixture of Memories

A youngster is walking near the ring area, carrying two cups of pop that he had just purchased at the concession stand. Arch-villain, Lenny Montana (one-half of the tag team champions at one time), spots the youngster, rolls out of the ring during his match and starts to lunge in the kid's direction. Needless to say, the poor kid spilled both cups of pop and scurried down the aisle as the crowd voiced its disapproval of Montana's brand of humor. This is circa 1960.

I think I've mentioned this one before. Mad Dog Vachon, at the time the most hated man in wrestling, is battling his opponent at the High School in St. Louis Park. He gets tossed from the ring when a small girl approaches him with an autograph pad. The Mad Dog startles the crowd, his opponent, and the referee by putting up his hand to stop the referee's count, signing the autograph pad, and then climbing back in to continue the match. Vintage 1968.

The old WTCN studios at the Calhoun Beach Hotel. I had finished reading an article in one of the national magazines about how wrestlers very often will not eat for at least six hours before a match. No sooner did I conclude the article when Larry Hennig asked me to go down to the cafeteria and pick him up a hamburger with the works. He wrestled about ten minutes after wolfing down the meat. 1972, summertime.

Badman Jose Quintero was one of the real familiar faces in TV looserdom throughout the 60's. His favorite expression, virtually after every match, was to tell the referee "you gave me a fast count, you son-of-a-bitch". At any rate, one afternoon at the Dyckman Hotel (now demolished and one time home of the Minneapolis Wrestling Club), a friend of mine asked Quintero to autograph the outside of the envelope. Inside the envelope were various photos of better wrestlers. Quintero opened the envelope, spit on one of the signed pictures (I don't know who got the honors), then replaced them and signed the autograph. When it came to class, this guy had zilch. 1965, I believe.

Speaking of the Dyckman Hotel, for about 10 years it was our Saturday afternoon hangout as we waited with anticipation for the wrestlers to appear on their way to the sixth floor office. It was Reggie Parks, noted for strength of his stomach muscles, that complained to the wrestling office secretary, insisting that we be barred from sitting in the lobby of the hotel. Well, we never were barred from the building and Parks left no visible impression on the AWA either. One of the real lowlights of 1964.

Sitting by a cloth backdrop at the TV wrestling bouts in the summer of '66, hushed in silence while Verne Gagne was doing a live commercial for his vitamins, "Gera-Speed". From behind this backdrop I heard George Gadaski tell someone, "I don't know if it was coincidence or what, but I took that stuff once and got the worst cold of my life."

Memories tend to run into the disgusting, too. Such as the night that The Crusher wrestled on television minus a very important piece of protective equipment that he wears in the vicinity of his trunks. When the Crusher mounted the ropes to jump on an opponent, he exposed to one and all more than what most of the fans wanted to see. Aside from Watergate, that was the real crime of 1972.

(WINTER 82)

Marriage Plus Wrestling

I don't want to embarrass her, but I'd like to make mention here of my wife, Karen. My "better two-thirds", as Nick calls her, has become the proverbial "wrestling widow". Consider that in an average month, she is subjected to eight hours of the Minneapolis TV wrestling show, twelve hours of Georgia Wrestling on cable, eight hours of New York's TV wrestling show, and at least one or two cards from either Madison Square Garden, or perhaps Landover, Maryland.

Add to that the time spent reviewing the video tapes of all the above, various super-8 wrestling movies, photo scrutinizing, writing, reading, publishing, etc. to say nothing of the stacks of magazines, programs, bulletins, newsletters, etc. that give our apartment a rather unusual decor. Karen likes wrestling, and although she's a bit bewildered at her husband's fixation with it, she allows the time and space necessary to fill the appetite of a ravenous wrestling writer.

I may have gone overboard, though, when I managed to take in three hours of a cable TV card from Madison Square Garden on the second night of our honeymoon.

(WINTER 82)

Minneapolis Ringsiders Observed

We now take a look at those who crawl out from beneath their respective rocks to grace the Minneapolis Auditorium on Grant Street with their presence.

There's an idiot who parades around ringside in a mask which remarkably resembles Baron Von Raschke. Of course, this refugee from Planet Moron flashes the "claw" hold at everyone as he parades by, drawing applause of those who, collectively, have a vocabulary of eight words.

In virtually every arena around the AWA these days, there are characters like those in Minneapolis who wear the costume of Sheik El-Kaissie. You know, the turbans, the big schtick. Too bad they aren't adorned in electric blankets so I could short-circuit them whenever they walked by.

Let me quickly speak of a gentleman who has affectionately been dubbed, "Spud" by many of us, for his remarkable resemblance to Mr. Potato Head. The guy has ears like Mr. Spock, hair that hasn't ever heard of shampoo, and a personality that combines the good traits of Charles Manson, Sparky the Seal, and Herman Munster. I made the mistake of riding a bus home with this unexplainable character one afternoon. Have you ever sat with someone who talked at the top of his voice and motioned frantically with his hands, at a time when you just wanted to be left alone? Yup. It happened to me. The bus seat has a permanent indentation where I slowly sank into it in a state of horrible embarrassment.

Little Ricky is still around, for those who have expressed some concern. The starting shortstop for a baseball team composed of ants and termites, Little Ricky seems to be mellowing, of all things. His usual chants of "Bockwinkel's a loser" have died down considerably. Instead, that husky, booming voice of his emits such cries as , "Robinson's going to win the title", "Hulk, Hulk, Hulk", and "I can't see, sit down!!". Still blinding ringsiders with an array of suspenders that rival Steve Regal, this little ball of something or other can't be all bad, though: He's still the only creature ever to call George Shire, "Jerry". Why? I don't have the foggiest idea.

Another newcomer. Here's a woman with perhaps the most vulgar, foulest mouth I've ever heard on a woman. Ever. I'll grant you, it's exciting to listen to, but that's neither here nor there. She calls the wrestlers some names that drunken sailors would add to their vocabulary. The interesting thing is that this walking (or should I say,--waddling) blob of rotundus is about as appealing as a package of flu virus. What's the old joke about knocking the buzzard off with a certain type of wagon? I don't know who she is, what she is, why she is, or what community she swallowed before she came into the arena, but one of these days, she's going to pop, and it'll be Katie bar the door.

And amidst all this sits old Frank. If Frank is anything short of 250 years old, I'll be surprised. He's got more wrinkles than my dress pants. And yet, night after night, year after year, there he is, bounding up out of his ringside seat to make obscene gestures at the wrestlers. His confrontations with Jesse Ventura were classics. Old Jess used to tell him to sit down before he needed an ambulance. I, myself, once made an attempt to talk to old Frank, to get to know him better, but I was too busy measuring the gap between his teeth to hear what he was saying.

With all these various and sundry types of living question marks sitting at ringside, the question has come to mind: What is George Shire doing sitting among them?

(SUMMER 82)

Like Father-Like Son

Those of us who have questioned the current athletic ability and stamina of Larry "The Axe" Hennig are doing a double-take these days. Despite the fact that he huffed and puffed like the big bad wolf in the "Three Little Pigs" when he wrestled Adrian Adonis, and then spent most of the time on the ring apron in a tag team match recently, the Big Axe still had one good battle left in him. At a Twin Cities department store, he took on various members of the sports and entertainment community, all at the same time, and soundly whipped all of them! The problem was that this was not in the ring, but in a contest to see who could eat the most cookies in a given time limit.

I kid you not. Larry "The Axe" Hennig, whose pounds are beginning to equal the number of matches he's wrestled in his pro career, is now the cookie-eating champion of the Twin Cities. It hardly ranks up there with the tag team title he held with Harley Race, but methinks that at this point in time, he'll settle for any title at all.

(JUNE 83)

And Finally... A Tribute To The One And Only: Nick Bockwinkel

I'm no stranger to professional wrestling. I've been following it for a long time, in a very devoted fashion. I've seen hundreds and hundreds of wrestlers, I'm sure, but I've never been as impressed with any of them as I have with Nick Bockwinkel.

Quite frankly, back in the fall of 1970, when I heard that Nick Bockwinkel was coming to the territory governed by the American Wrestling Association, I didn't get all that excited. Lacking the correspondence network that I do now, and just basing my feelings about wrestlers I hadn't seen on what I read in magazines, I was anticipating just another crowd-pleaser in the person of Mr. Bockwinkel. I, too, had long been a fan of the clean types, but I started to turn around and really appreciate the countless talents of wrestling's villain element in the late 60's.

When Nick arrived, all the pre-conceived notions I had about him were quickly shattered. This was no ordinary wrestler, this was Nick Bockwinkel. He even looked differently than I had expected: I was anticipating the crew cut, a much more slender wrestler, much more humble, etc., etc.--you get the picture. But when Nick arrived, I was treated to a wrestler whose style was sensational, capable of all the moves, and you would associate him with purely scientific wrestlers, but mixing in enough of the rough style as to create a sterling blend of the very best of both.

And the Bockwinkel interviews: unsurpassed. That was the real attraction, as far as I was concerned. I had never heard an approach to the microphone quite like it. And I loved it. And I still love it. I have never been bored by a Nick Bockwinkel interview and in fact, have so many of them on audio and video tape that I could listen to them for hours. The quiet confidence, the self-assured style, the million dollar vocabulary, the wit, the sarcasm: the Bockwinkel interview quickly became such a staple in the AWA area that news media and

various colleges, so enthralled with the Bock, approached him for interviews and to give speeches.

And what of Nick's matches? I don't think there is a wrestler that I have seen over the years give 110% as consistently as Nick Bockwinkel. As I've mentioned before, in all I've watched Nick in the multitudes of matches I've seen, only Andre the Giant could turn a match with Mick into a dreary affair. As I mentioned in a previous bulletin, the Giant was injured early in one of their matches, and literally laid all over Nick for 60 minutes as the bout went to a draw. As classic a wrestler and as talented as Nick is, you are rendered pretty incapable when you have 500 pounds smothering you.

Beyond the Giant, I have gotten so many thrills from Nick's bouts over the years that they are innumerable, but some memories glitter: Needless to say, the championship victory over Verne Gagne in November of '75 stands out most vividly: I thought sure that somewhere during the week there would be an announcement of a reversal of a decision and the title reverted back to Verne. I was delighted and surprised when it didn't happen, and proud to represent a man who held off the world's best wrestlers for the next five years. All of the Bockwinkel-Gagne matches were absolute classics.

Billy Robinson, as much as many Brigadiers detest the guy, probably had greater matches with Nick than anyone. They really seemed to bring out the very best in each other. Nick came out on the short end of the stick in a lot of the matches with Robinson, but more than won his share, and I can't remember the two of them ever putting on anything less than a sensational match.

The Crusher was a real nemesis of the Bock's too, primarily in tag team matches. But one particular evening, in a cage match, I remember Nick suffering a brutal-looking fall from the top of the cage. Their matches were crowd-pleasers, always, and of course Crusher had coined the name "Hoodwinkel", for our man.

As I said, the opponents are innumerable. Greg Gagne, Jim Brunzell (Brunzell's matches with Nick were absolutely spectacular, among the greatest singles matches I've seen Nick in), the Mighty Igor, Dr. Bill Miller, Ed Carpentier, Red Bastien, the late Hercules Cortez, Dick the Bruiser, etc., etc., etc., all were AWA threats. And over the past six or seven years, Nick has expanded his territory so that there really aren't boundaries anymore where he won't go in defense of the title, in defense of the very words, "World's Heavyweight Champion".

Beyond the matches, outside of the squared circle, is a relationship that Nick has developed not only with me, but with all of you, as well. It has been well-documented over and over again in these pages about how great Nick has been to me, to the club members from city to city. Our conventions speak for themselves; that we are the longest running fan club for an honorary that I know of, something to be proud of; that Nick's cooperation has kept us going for all this time is something to be grateful for. We've all been through Nick's sheepish denials of how much he enjoys this fan club and the attention that we've given him over the years, me moreso than anyone. The good-natured jabs, the quips, the "insults", it's part of the territory and it's all Nick Bockwinkel.

No, Nick wasn't the first wrestler I approached to have a fan club. As many of you know, I even sputtered along with a club for Crusher in 1965, young, tremendously naive and totally ignored by the guy I thought was my honorary. And even in the summer of '71, unsure of how this intellectual named Bockwinkel would respond to my request to run a club in his honor, and yet itching to get back in the bulletin business, I approached one Bobby Heenan, seeking permission to get something going on behalf of he and Blackjack Lanza. Heenan told me to "get away and stop bothering" him. Two weeks later, I was heading the Brigade.

The very meeting, the very introduction to Nick himself is the memory that lingers. Approaching him at the TV station with Neal Gale, Alan Gale, and Paul Perschmann, all of us enthralled with him, Nick gave his now world-famous permission to begin a Bockwinkel Brigade---stipulating, of course, that we do it on our own, that he not be put upon to do anything for the club. He's been tremendously helpful ever since.

Well, troops, it's over eleven years later. Neal is still around periodically, but not in any capacity with the Brigade; Alan is married and living in Michigan, also detached from the club; Perschmann is meeting with great success in the wrestling profession. And yet one guy is still hanging on to the Bockwinkel Brigade, having conventions, printing bulletins, and maintaining contact with those around the country that share the same admiration for Nick, in and out of the ring.

Has Nick been right all this time? Am I really just a demented masochist?

(FALL 1982) ***

THE BEST OF THE QUOTEBOOK
Featuring Bobby Heenan

(On a jobber): "He'll be looking out the backside of his pockets next week, won't he."

(Concerning Vannah White): "You know, she and I, on those supermarket tabloids, have been linked up as romantically involved."

"Elizabeth is pretty in a gaudy way."

(Concerning Elizabeth): "She's a woman, of course she's helpless."

(Concerning The Honkeytonk Man): "I'd rather listen to him sing than wrestle."

(Concerning Hulk Hogan's Nickelodeon Award): "The last thing I want is an award given to me by a bunch of kids that got strained beets on their face and are sitting on a potty chair."

(Concerning Matilda): "Take that miserable mutt for a long, long walk... on a short peer."

(Concerning The Ultimate Warrior): "Wherever he's from, he should have stayed there."

"I found out something. That's not a bulldog, it's their sister, Matilda Smith."

(Concerning Superstar Graham): "He's the only man I know who tie-dyed his face. Look at that ridiculous looking beard."

(Concerning Ken Patera): "For all of you people in Wisconsin, he made your license plates."

(Concerning Junkyard Dog): "Yeah, the national chain salesman."

(Concerning "Alaskan" Dave Wagner): "Who cuts Wagner's hair? The State?"

(Concerning Ken Patera): "They named a game after him. Solitaire."

"Before you can walk a mile, you have to take that first step."

(Concerning Junkyard Dog): "He's the Fred Sanford of professional wrestling."

(To Vince McMahon): "You look like the kind of guy who could have fun alone."

(Concerning Superstar Graham and Don Muraco): "These two guys couldn't find their way out of a phone booth."

(Concerning One Man Gang): "The man has got terminal termites."

"Matilda would have gotten a lot more mail but Dynamite and Davey Boy ran out of stamps."

(Concerning Hacksaw Duggan): "You know what's got nine teeth and an I-Q of eleven? His whole family."

(Concerning Bob Uecker): "He's the only man to have a batting average even with Hacksaw Duggan's I-Q."

"I don't like Gorillas and I hate dogs. I don't even like people who own animals. I think they're stupid."

Someone from Somewhere: "People who live in glass houses shouldn't throw stones."

"People who live in glass houses, shouldn't."

(Concerning Hacksaw Duggan): "There's woodpecker breath himself."

(Concerning Ted DiBiase's lucrative offer to Hulk Hogan): "I wish he'd make that offer to me, I'll tell ya' that."

"You know what Rougeaus stands for in French? It stands for "coward"."

Someone from Somewhere: "A friend in need is a friend indeed."

"You know my motto. Live and let live... and a friend in need is a pest."

THE WRESTLING RING ANATOMY

WRESTLING RING ANATOMY by Brad Breitzman

What is the one thing, that without, there could be no show? Answer: The Ring. There is probably much more that you don't know about wrestling rings than you do know. "Okay, what's so interesting about rings, you ask?"

It serves as a battle ground for warriors, the stage in which the players perform. It sits in the middle of a dark arena, lit as the focal point for cameras and crowds. It is... a wrestling ring.

Professional wrestling has always been held in a ring. Just as the styles of wrestling have changed through the annals of history, so have the rings. Many years ago, the rings were considerably larger. You've seen them on clips of "Mat Classics" or "Golden Era" when wrestlers would have to run three miles to do a criss-cross or when only half the ring was visible on a wide camera shot. In short, the ring was used to represent square football fields with ropes.

Today, the majority of rings are between sixteen and twenty feet. The rings used today vary depending on the promotion. All of the Titan rings are virtually indistinguishable from each other. That's probably the way Vince McMahon wants it. The strange thing about WWF rings is that they almost all utilize the use of actual ropes rather than hosing over steele cable, which is the most common form. Some smaller promotions don't exclusively own a ring, and thus rent them from a local person who does own one. It costs between 200 and 500 dollars to rent a ring for one night, including delivery and set-up. For promotions which don't run full time, it is worth renting, rather than buying. Then maintenance, transportation, set-up, and the substantial initial cost of a ring is not necessary. For promotions that run full-time, the rent would obviously add up to where buying a ring would become mandatory. The cost of a new ring obviously varies, as do prices of cars and hamburgers. However, I was told a new ring would cost in the neighborhood of three to five thousand dollars...

There are many myths about rings, and hopefully the following article will clear up any questions you may have about them.

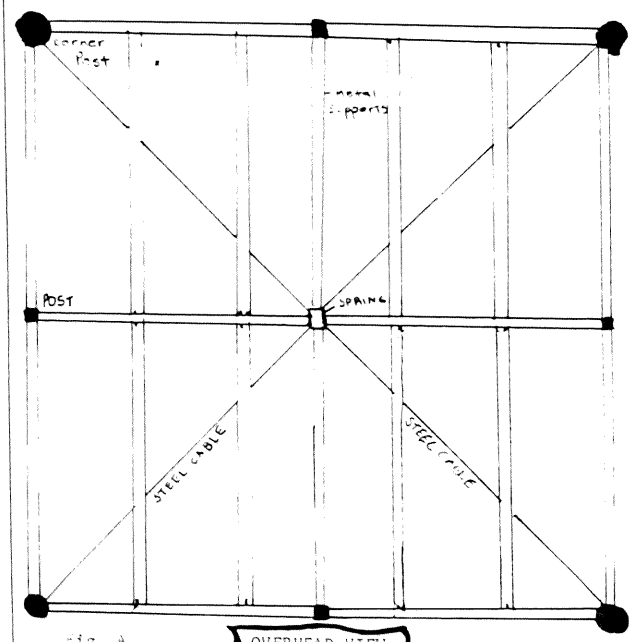
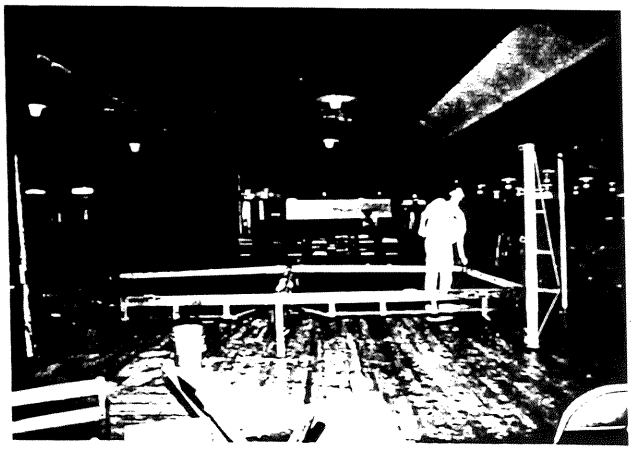


Fig. A OVERHEAD VIEW



THE EARLY STAGES OF THE RING'S CONSTRUCTION
(Photo by Wade Keller)

THE CONSTRUCTION

The time it takes to set up a wrestling ring varies depending on the ring's size, how many people are helping, etc.

When not assembled, the ring can fit in a fairly compact space. For example, a sixteen foot ring (one of the smaller sizes) can fit in the back of an enclosed pick-up truck.

I myself, have helped set up one particular ring on several occasions. From unloading the ring from the truck, to tightening the ropes it took three people an average of 91 minutes 53 seconds to assemble (okay, about an hour and a half).

The ring is constructed from the middle. The center spring is first set where the ring is to be centered. Then supports are added the entire width of the ring making a large "X". The corner posts are then connected to the ends

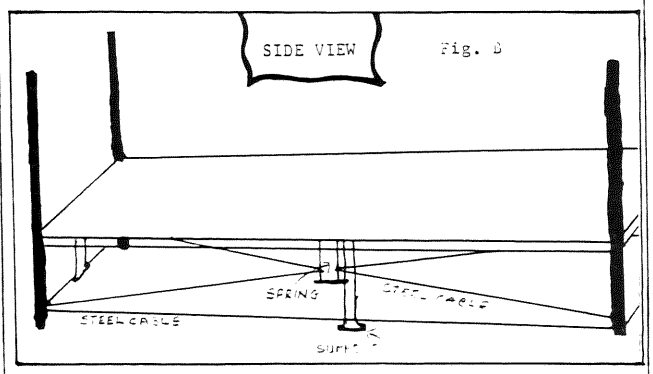


Fig. B

of the width supports. Ten to twelve heavy metal supports are placed snuggly between the outer and inner frame (See Fig. A). Large nails or spikes connect the metal supports to the frame, making the frame sturdy and complete. I should also mention that steel cables coupled with turnbuckles are utilized under the ring to keep the structure in complete balance. Lengths of cable are attached from the center spring canister to the base of each ringpost, and from ringpost to ringpost (See Fig. B). If this gets confusing, look at the accompanying drawings. Next, a number of plywood sheets are placed snuggly in each of the respective rectangles formed by the supports, basically creating a sturdy floor or platform. It was probably one of these plywood boards breaking that caused Adrian Adonis to fall through the ring in Minot, ND several months ago. Padding, about one inch in thickness, which is transported rolled-up, wrapped in foil (no, I'm thinking of Ho Ho's) are unrolled into place covering the entire

(continued on page 18)

ALL TIME FAVORITES

Every long-time wrestling fan has a certain wrestler that they consider their "all-time favorite". This wrestler may not be able to put together a good wrestling match, or even a good interview, but something about him sticks out in their mind as being special. The folowing is a feature with letters from the readers of The Pro Wrestling Torch Newsletter concerning their all-time favorites. You, the readers, have done a great job in writing the letters, so now sit back and enjoy...

MIKE MATTESON:

I've only been a wrestling fan for about three years, but have embraced "the sport" fully. In these three years I've seen thousands of hours of wrestling from all over via tapes and TV.

By far and away, my favorite wrestler is Owen Hart. He creates excitement in matches that can't carry it any other way. A lot of times his presence in a match generates the only excitement. His athletic ability, along with his flying acrobatic skills give credence to the fact that wrestlers are athletes. The image (physical) and skills Owen shows help offset the joke attitude created among non- wrestling fans created by guys like Dusty Rhodes, etc.

Hopefully he will get more exposure nationally to the point of embarrassing guys that give the sport a bad reputation. Hopefully guys like Owen and others (Brain Pillman, etc.) will rise to the top and create new fans along the way.

* *

BRAD BREITZMAN:

Back in the days when I believed that wrestling may have been real, my all-time favorite wrestler was established in my mind. Georgia Championship Wrestling came on every Saturday afternoon (just as it does today). It was always a mini-crisis whenever I'd have to miss it. The line-up back then included Tommy Rich, The Armstrongs, Roddy Piper, Dusty Rhodes, John Studd, and last but certainly not least, my all-time favorite wrestler, "The Mad Dog" Buzz Sawyer.

Sawyer was a superheel then feuding against Tommy Rich. Some of their studio brawls were the very best of their kind. One particular incident stands out in my mind when Rich attacked Sawyer in a dressing room with a garbage can.

I've been told that Buzz has basically been blacklisted today. I know that he is very well received in Japan. Maybe a major promoter could gamble and use him as the "Mad Dog".

* *

NELS LOOSER:

Although a lot of people don't like him because he's hopped the fence between good and evil so many times it is ridiculous, my favorite wrestler is "Superstar" Bill Dundee. Every time I hear a Dundee interview, it is either really intense or (usually) comical. Every angle I've seen him involved in seems to be a good one that really entertains me. Every angle I've seen him involved in seems to be a good one that really entertains me. I've also rarely seen a Billy Dundee match that I was bored with. Lastly, after seeing the recent FNN/Score special with the Lawler and Dundee versus Idol and Rich scaffold match, Dundee is my obvious choice. While all other competitors were walking slowly and cautiously or even crawling around, Billy was up on both feet and even chasing people full-speed across the scaffold. He is obviously not afraid of heights and seems at ease up on a scaffold. Because of his mastery of the interview and ability to carry his end of an angle and usually good (not necessarily great) matches, my favorite all-time wrestler is Bill Dundee.

* *

NANCY RIDLEY

Ric Flair.

* *

MR. NAME WITHHELD VIA REQUEST:

My all time favorite wrestler? WIthout a doubt, the one who scared me the most--more than any other since---the one and only Wild Bill Curry.

I was barely ten years old when I first saw Wild Bill Curry on Channel 9 from Windsor, Ontario. I was horrified! Bull had a gimmick--that face--that legendary face. The unruly Brillo Pad hair, the eyebrows to match. That face with the expression of a lunatic. His unintelligible bellows. The way he held his hands over his cauliflowered ears to keep the noise of the fans out. Bull Curry was certifiable. The announcer (Lord Layton) told me that. But I had already decided that for myself. I can picture myself with my eyes and mouth open wide, staring at the screen, unable to imagine that a creature such as this was allowed to wrestle. Ah, the innocence of youth. No one destroyed TV opponents like the Bull. No one told off referees or pushed around Lord Layton like the Bull. No one was safe. Not even the audience. Because when Bull left the ring, you never knew where he'd head. The audience never stayed around to find out--they'd scatter when he approached, tipping over chairs and guardrails in his path. Sheer terror prevailed! No horror movie scared me more. no monsters or creatures ever gave me nightmares--after all, they were make-believe, but Wild Bill Curry was real!

Times have changed. People argue whether wrestling was better in the "old days" than it is today. Maybe it's because I was young and impressionable. Maybe I've become sort of calloused over the years. But with all due respect to the great heels of today, whom I admire, no one has ever made an impression on me like Wild Bill Curry.

* *

LARRY SAALE:

I like many wrestlers, but my all time favorite wrestler is The Midnight Rider because...

...Come to think of it, he's not my favorite wrestler!

* *

VICTOR MARTINEZ:

Concerning my all time favorite wrestler, I suppose my choice is largely sentimental, Ricky Romero, back in the 60's when I was a kid. I remember him fondly, a genuine nice guy. The kids used to flock around him after the matches, always got gifts from him. As a worker, he had a wide arsenal of moves he could do. And he really knew how to work the crowd, particularly in areas with heavy Hispanic communities.

* *

MIKE McKENNA

Of all the great wrestlers, my favorite has to be Michael Hayes. I've always enjoyed watching the rough and tough Hayes brawl against the best of them. Hayes is not the biggest nor the strongest but can definitely hold his own. He's fought the best of them from Kerry Von Erich to Rick Martel to Ric Flair. He fell just short of capturing Rick Martel's (and Flair's for that matter) title on numerous occasions which just goes to show he can also be a finesse wrestler. Add to all of that his tag team experience (with Gordy and Roberts) and you have one very experienced wrestler. With the exception of maybe the Four Horsemen you have (or had) the greatest tag team ever. The Freebirds were by far the most exciting team in the 80's to watch!! Hayes led the Birds to great success. Even though the Birds are no longer a team , look for Hayes to be a hot contender for the World Class Title.

* *

JON GALLAGHER

I still remember the first time I saw him on TV. Ring announcer, the late Marty O'Neil had just announced the Big K as the manager and Kobiashi in one corner. Kobiashi went bonkers when he saw his opponent as Mary, almost without thought, announce his opponent as "Bobby Van".

Bobby Van was a TV jobber and this guy across the ring from the famous Japanese star was not Van. I didn't recognize him. Roger Kent called him "Billy Robinson" and after just a few moments of watching him, it was obvious that he was no ordinary TV jobber.

Every move he made was fluid. He had a counter to every move Kobiashi tried. And in the end, he pinned Kobiashi clean in the middle of the ring.

The studio audience went wild. Roger Kent was uncontrollable. Marty was running to the interview spot to find out more about this sensational new wrestler.

Over the next decade, we got to see Billy Robinson in action regularly. Only Verne Gagne's ego prevented Robinson from capturing the AWA crown. In two meetings in Chicago between the two, Verne had to play the heel to Robinson's babyface, a role Gagne played only twice in his career.

Robinson was a new style wrestler, a transition between the old style of the sixties and the high spot wrestler we know today. He was one of the first to employ flashy moves as opposed to the on the mat work of his predecessors. How good was he? Good enough to have trained some of today's biggest stars including Ric Flair.

A couple of years ago in Chicago, Robinson wrestled Flair. Robinson was well past his prime, yet Flair requested the match with his teacher. In the match, it is said that Robinson actually carried the match. Flair gave his mentor time to rest when he needed it, but the entire match was well paced and called by Robinson. Once again, Ric Flair had been given a wrestling lesson.

If not for the politics of the day, Billy Robinson might have been given his proper place in wrestling history with a title belt. But in the days of only one title per promotion, the chance was never given. The man who may have been wrestling's greatest worker will always be known as "the uncrowned champion"...

I tried, but I couldn't do it. I just can't name one favorite wrestler without naming the other. One had to be the greatest worker of all time and the other the greatest brawler of all time.

They called him by many names. He once used Pigmeat Markham's "Here come da' judge" as entrance music before music became popular. He was known as the "wrestler who made Milwaukee famous", da' one...da' only...da' Crusher.

Early in his career, Crusher Reggie Lisowski worked as a heel. His trademark cigar was always crammed in the corner of his mouth as he threatened to "kill da' bum" he was to wrestle. He was feared by all.

But that was before my time. I only saw Crush work as a face, his first feud in my memory being with the "Dolly Sisters" Handsome Harley Race and Pretty Boy Larry Hennig.

His training regiment was also legendary: Jog around Lake Michigan with a keg of beer on each shoulder. They were both empty by the time he finished, or so he said. He also had a fondness for dancing the Polka with the "Fat Dames". Hulk Hogan had to have stolen his line from Crusher about his twenty-four inch pythons; Crusher was the first with 100 megaton arms.

Crusher wrestled well past his prime, but was one of the few who can claim to have worked in five decades (40's, 50's, 60's, 70's and 80's). To this day, every time I hear the song, "Roll Out the Barrel", I think of one of my all time favorites, da' one, da' only, da' Crusher.

* *

LINDA KELTNER

Tommy "Wildfire" Rich is my all time favorite wrestler. I've been a fan of his since I started watching wrestling in 1982. His style, charisma, and good looks quickly won me over. I don't see him wrestle on television or arenas anymore, but I follow his career as best as I can. Rule breaker or fan favorite, Tommy will always be number-one to me.

* *

WALT MARSHALL

My all-time favorite wrestler is "The All American Boy Bob Backlund". In my book he was the best. He was like my idol when I was little (I'm 17 now and I guess I was around 9 or 10 when I first started to like him as my hero). I wish he would come back today either in the WWF or the NWA because I would like to see him in the ring again. When I go to the Philadelphia Spectrum when Hulk Hogan is there you've got these fans out there chanting "Bob Backlund will come back to get his title". Some are "We want Backlund". Could you find out if Backlund has any plans to enter the ring again. If so where?

* *

JASON POWELL

My favorite wrestler may surprise a few people. But you said it didn't have to be the best wrestler. My favorite wrestler is Hulk Hogan. Ever since I first saw the Hulkster in the AWA he's amazed me. How can one man be so popular. He's not a scientific wonder, he's not a pretty boy, he's just Hulk Hogan. He's the man who put wrestling back on Network Television, he's the man who sold out a 93,000 seat stadium, and put wrestling back on prime time television. Along with Vince McMahon he's made wrestling what it is today. So whether you like him or hate him, Hulk Hogan is what wrestling is all about.

* *

VERONICA KILLIAN

My all-time favorite wrestler has to be Ric Flair. This man is class, with a capitol "C". He never backs down from a challenge and he's a seasoned veteran that knows every move, hold, and counter move ever invented. He's an excellent player of either a "heel" or a "babyface". He's always first to compliment his advisers and gives credit where credit is due. He gives a fantastic interview and is a genuinely nice guy.

* *

ELYSE ZOIS

I'd like to take this opportunity to talk about my all-time favorite wrestler. He first came to the WWF as a heel in 1979 and quickly became one of the most hated men there, going against such favorites as Bob Backlund and Andre the Giant. When he left, there were few who were sorry to see him go. Yet by the time of his return in late 1983, he was well on his way to becoming one of the most popular wrestlers of all time. Of course by now you know that I'm talking about former World Champion Hulk Hogan. He's been criticized by many for his lack of wrestling skills and yet he has the ability to draw more fans to a wrestling arena than anyone else. Just what is this magic that he has?

From the time the Hulkster enters the arena until the time he leaves, excitement reigns. The crowd stands to get a better look at this magnificent physical specimen as he strides to the ring, accompanied by the strains of "Real American". The yells grow louder as he enters the ring and rips off his shirt. When he points to his opponent, looks at the fans and nods, they know that he means business, that he is ready to rid the world of whatever evil his opponent represents. It's more than just a contest between two men. It's a battle between the forces of evil and the forces of good, between all that is wrong and all that is right. As the match progresses there is an unbroken communication between him and the fans, so that everyone there seems to be a part of it. No one

thinks about whether or not all this is real nor worries how many wrestling holds have been used. All that matters is the action in the ring, building to that final legdrop that announces that the end is near. The referee's hand goes down and the fans count to three with him. As Hulk's arm is raised, the crowd rises to its feet again for the final pose down, feeling that good has triumphed once more.

This is the talent that Hulk Hogan has, the ability to make people enjoy watching wrestling. Call it charisma, call it personality--well--call it Hulkamania. This is what makes him so popular. This is what keeps the fans coming back time after time. This is what turned an intelligent, logical, level-headed person like myself into a wrestling addict. I think that's pretty good.

* *

JAY F. STEELE

A lot has been said and written recently about this all-time great. Let me first say that Bruno was my idol when I was growing up (along with Roberto Clemente). I can say that to me Bruno was wrestling. You have to give Bruno a lot of credit to wrestle people like Kowalski, Steele, Mortier, Monsoon, and Tanaka year in and year out. He continued to draw well with the same cast in the N. East for years. He was somehow able to keep the feuds fresh. It would have to take a lot of work to do this. Bruno is very underrated on interviews. Bruno drew well monthly, year in and year out. Hogan may go into Boston four times a year and sell-out, however, if he comes monthly, he can't sell-out. In fact even late in his career, Bruno outdrew Hogan in Boston. Bruno always gave 100%. I can't say the same for Hogan. I never left the arena feeling cheated after Bruno's bouts, which is also special considering he may run into a bad opponent, or just had a bad night. Many times I feel Hogan cheated me. Bruno really could draw the heat. one thing can be said about Bruno is he's a class person inside and out.

* *

WADE KELLER

I wasn't going to do this because no one sticks out in my mind as my all-time favorite. Though, if I had to pick the wrestler who I have enjoyed watching the most over the years, it has to be Curt Hennig. Ever since his matches with Adrian Adonis, where Adrian claimed he could beat the "punk kid" in less that ten minutes, I followed his career. He has progressed from Larry Hennig's son-"The Little Axe", to one of the, if not the, greatest performers in wrestling today. His recent skit in Memphis where he threatened Lance Russell unless Jerry Lawler came out was fantastic. His wrestling skill has progressed into being a top three wrestler. He takes the best bumps in the business, bar none. When Greg Gagne punched him last February and he flew backwards over the top rope into the cage, I was convinced Ted DiBiase didn't have a thing on Hennig. In a time where wrestlers jump to any organization for money, forgetting their past, Hennig is one of the few who is loyal to both Verne Gagne & The AWA and Don Owens & PNW. I can't remember a Curt Hennig match that I felt slighted on. Yeah, several years down the line, Curt Hennig may go down as my all-time favorite. Right now, he is indeed one of the greatest performers in the business.

* *

JOE LANCELLO

Two wrestlers that always bring a smile to my face are Billy Robinson and the late George "Scrap Iron" Gadaski. To this day I'll argue that Robinson should have been Champion. The only gimmick he needed was his ability, his moves. Even this past February, against Tom Zenk, when he really shouldn't have been in the ring, he put on the old moves and the crowd loved it. He could have had a classic feud with [illegible]ckwinkel and an annual "scientific battle" Verne. Sadly, it wasn't meant to be. Billy Robinson was a pro.

So, in another way, was Gadaski. Sure, he got beat every week on TV. But there was something about the guy. Nothing like the charisma Flair, Hogan or Sting has. You really emphasized with the guy, working his butt off against someone a little bigger, a little better, or even a little sneakier; thinking THIS might be the time "Scrap Iron" would get his reward. Hopefully, he has now. I miss him.

* *

MARC ARONIN

My all-time favorite is Antonio Argentina Rocca. He would back a man into the ropes and barefooted slap him across the face with his feet. It is 35 years later and this has yet to be duplicated. While probably not the first to use a flying drop kick, he did single-handedly popularize it to the point where it entered everyone's repertoire. His fans used to gather outside his Spanish Harlem Hotel and serenade him. He was far and away the most popular star and biggest draw of his time. He sold out arenas across the country wrestling Hans Schmidt, Killer Kowalski, Don Leo Jonathan, Primo Carners, Lou Thesz, Buddy Rogers, etc. With his tag team partner, Miguel Perez, he sold out the original Madison Square Garden month after month against Dr. Jerry and Eddie Graham, Dick the Bruiser and various partners, etc. He also had a unique ring attitude: His facial and body expressions changed from moment to moment. Sometimes he looked like a kid, sometimes a vulture. He is still the only "good guy" I've ever cheered for. Words cannot do him justice. He can be seen on video tape on 1) "Wrestling's Greatest heroes: The Golden Age" 2) "Wrestlings Greatest Villains: The Golden Age" 3) "Golden Age of Wrestling Vol. 1 & 2" 4) "Madison Square Gardens: Antonio Rocca" ***

(WRESTLING RING ANATOMY continued from page 15)

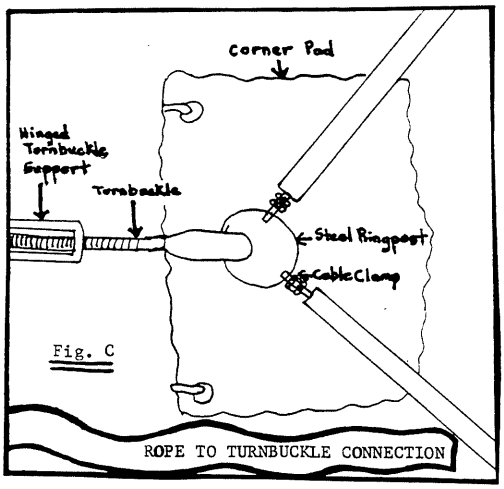


Fig. C

surface of the platform. Finally the canvas cover is spread out over the entire ring floor and is then tied tightly to the sides of the entire contraption. What's left? Oh right, the ropes! The ropes are in the form of a big circle with turnbuckles attached every sixteen, seventeen, eighteen feet (whatever length the ring is), which are connected to loops on the ringposts. The ropes are then tightened by twisting hinged turnbuckle supports (See Fig. C). I'm sure you've seen someone standing on the ring apron between matches tightening the ropes before. The ring apron is the last thing to go on. The only purpose for the ring apron is for looks, or in the case of Memphis, advertising. It also hides what some consider a secret- the underside of the ring. That is basically the procedure that is used to construct a ring. There are variances from ring to ring, however. Without the ring, there would be no action. And with the ring, these days, there might be action.

DEALING WITH WRESTLERS

The following article was written by Jon Gallagher for this annual. Gallagher is the editor of Wrestling Forum. You can get this fantastic newsletter twice a month for only $1.50 an issue. It's been around for several years and has become one of the very best. Write to Wrestling Forum; PO Box 65; Knoxville, IL 61448. I'd like to thank Jon for the following contribution...

DEALING WITH WRESTLERS

Over the past year and a half, a regular feature of Wrestling Forum has been "Wrestlers Are People Too", a column that is written by readers and takes a look at the out-of-the-ring personality of different wrestlers. The column was inspired by a reader who wrote, asking how he should approach wrestlers, especially in places like airports, restaurants, and other away-from-the-arena locales. Over the past few days in putting together this article, I've gone over all of the columns that have appeared and there seems to be some common points that might improve your chances of getting to meet and "talk shop" with your favorite wrestler.

Most wrestlers when approached by a "smart" or knowledgeable fan will take to the defensive almost immediately. They have been ingrained since the beginning of their careers, not to expose or discuss the business with outsiders. Perhaps the easiest way to end your meeting quickly is to call the wrestler by his real name. Though this will let the wrestler know that you are "smart", that is the only purpose it serves. The wrestler already knows his own real name and chances are that he will not stick around for conversation.

Instead, meeting a wrestler should be something like meeting a new girl. Find either a common interest to talk about, or something that the wrestler himself is interested in. By starting off your conversation with something like, "Hi, Mr. So-and-so. I hear you're interested in raising dogs", the wrestler can get an idea that you really are a fan of his, and thus may open him up to a lengthy conversation.

Another fact to take into consideration is the wrestler's ego. All wrestlers have one to a certain extent or another. Well placed compliments about his workrate can work wonders as well. The first comment might be something on the order of, "I really enjoyed your work tonight. You were really in top form." A comment like this might open him up. If not, you might follow up with a question about working with another wrestler.

One topic that wrestlers tend to shy away from is previous employers. Some will talk about working for a rival promotion, but only to acknowledge the fact that they worked there. Bad mouthing his old bosses is something that is rare and most will change the subject as soon as they can.

Some wrestlers will have a Jeckyl and Hyde personality. Whether working as a heel or a face, various wrestlers will vary in their reaction to fans. Many factors can be pointed to here, but there is once again a recurring theme as to why.

When wrestlers are approached at an arena, they are less likely to be cooperative with smart fans. The chance of exposing the business to marks is much greater here and as a result, the wrestler's ring persona must be adhered to. Even after the matches in the parking lot, a wrestler may protect the business by brushing autograph seekers.

Another spot that is wise to avoid is restaurants. Usually when a wrestler has the rare opportunity to enjoy himself away from the ring and away from fans, he values that time more than any other time. Common sense prevails here as you must ask yourself how you would feel if someone interrupted you're meal.

However, one of the best places to start a conversation with a wrestler seems to be the bar or lounge frequented after a hard night's work. Perhaps the liquid refreshments served in these locales help to open up wrestlers, but it seems that our readers have the best luck here.

The bottom line is in the approach itself. The old saying, "What goes around, comes around" is very appropriate here. Wrestlers who are approached with proper respect will return that respect. If you elect to approach a wrestler wit a smart aleck attitude, expect quick rejection. ***

ZHOZHAN THE WIZARD

"Better Late Than Never". The following feature is Zhozhan The Wizard's **Year End Awards** for 1987. Bobby Baum's "Zhozhan The Wizard" comics have appeared in The Pro Wrestling Torch Newsletter for several months now and the series concludes here in the annual. I would like to thank Bobby Baum for his contributions over the months...

ZHOZHAN THE WIZARD'S 1987 AWARDS

Best wrestling by a non-wrestler: Dick Butkus as "The Annihilator" in November 10th episode of Matlock.

Strangest Coincidence: The Wall Street Journal for running a front page story on Mexican wrestler Fray Tormenta the day the stock market crashed (Oct. 19).

Worst Business Decision: The Owner of the Olympic Auditorium in Los Angeles for not running any more shows with the Negro Casasa promotion after they outdrew everyone.

O Ring Award (for performing under circumstances likely to cause a catastrophe while really knowing better): Terry Gordy for continuing to wrestle with his bad knee. (Last Year: Hawk for wrestling in the Starrcade scaffold match with his broken leg.)

Best Unintentional Simulation of Pro Wrestling: FIDE, the international chess organization, for the world championship match between Anatoly Karpov and Gary Kasparov. (perennial winner)

Strangest Place To Show Wrestling: The news program Sunday Morning for showing a clip of Hulk Hogan during their coverage of the world chess championship (Dec. 13).

Best Emulation of The Stock Market: The Wrestling Network for its ratings.

Greatest Benefit To Pro Wrestling: Negro Casasa and El Hijo Del Santo for demonstrating the viability of lightweight wrestling in the US.

Greatest Harm To Pro Wrestling: Bill Watts for selling the UWF.

Most Underrated TV Show: Lucha Libre Coliseo for having twice as much wrestling per hour as other shows.

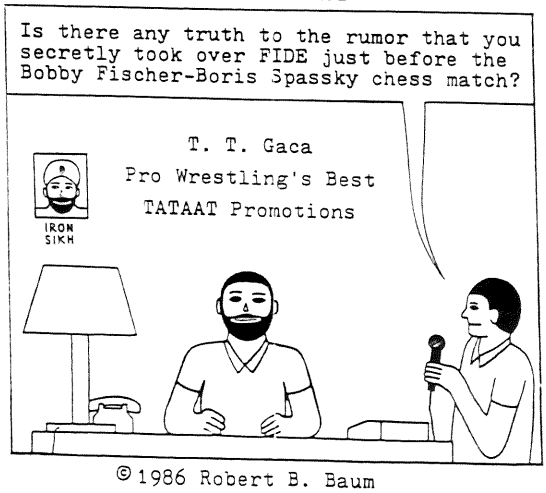
Most Unrepresented Nationally: Israeli.

Person With The Greatest Potential As A Wrestler: The Boz (Last Year: Same: 1985: James "Ox" Van Hoften (space shuttle astronaut)).

War Games Award: The WWF and NWA for The Battle of Thanksgiving.

Sloppy Editing Award: The Wrestling Network.

Best Name For A Promotion: World Class (give them credit for something). ***


ZHOZHAN THE WIZARD
Is there any truth to the rumor that you secretly took over FIDE just before the Bobby Fischer-Boris Spassky chess match?
T. T. Gaca
Pro Wrestling's Best
TATAAT Promotions
IRON SIKH
©1986 Robert B. Baum

TRAVEL BACK IN TIME

This is a reprint of an article on The Road Warriors. It was written by Ray Whebbe and published in **Insider News** on March 23, 1984. I feel this is a good representation of how "the tag team of the 80's", The Road Warriors, were thought of when they first came upon the scene. After reading this, decide for yourself if The Road Warriors should change their current style and "regress" back to the "we don't care" attitude they once projected...

NORTHSIDE TAG TEAM MENACES THE WRESTLING WORLD by Ray Whebbe Jr.

Once upon a time, wrestling fans were peaceful, untormented souls. Kids could sleep safely at night and Mom and Dad could do tedious chores like tend the garden or clean their garage without fear of some creature entering their space in life. Sure, there were evil forces around like the Blackjacks, the Sheiks, and blond bigmouths, but the forces of good always seemed to be able to handle them.

All that was before the North Minneapolis team of Hawk and Animal joined wrestling forces as The Road Warriors. These guys wear face paint, shave their heads in odd ways, and wear leather leg straps and boots. They could destroy a hotel like the Andrews, without tools, in one day. Their looks scare little kids and threaten the average male fan's manlihood. Women fans have yet to decide whether to lust after their bodies or to write them off as subhumans. After all, they just sneer, snicker, and twirl their tongues on interviews. They never talk in public.

They paint their faces as if they feel sick and look to their foes as "just someone else to beat on". The wrestling fans both love them and hate them. And although they've been in the game only nine months, they have become the number one team in the world.

Their physical makeups are impressive. Animal is 6'2", 290 lbs., and has a massive 58 inch chest and owns 22 inch biceps. The Hawk is the taller at 6'3.5", has 20 inch arms, and a 52 inch chest and weighs 270 pounds. The face paint and shaved heads are of course gimmicks, but who's laughing? Paint or not, these guys are totally awesome. Without a doubt, they are the strongest team in all of wrestling.

The wrestling hype says that they are from the alleys of Chicago. The Twin Citians know better. Hawk (Mike Hegstrand) is from North Minneapolis and Animal (Joe Larinidas) is from nearby Golden Valley. They began wrestling less than two years ago at South Central Ministry's church basement under the guidance of star maker Eddie Sharkey. A former wrestler himself, Sharkey knows talent when he sees it. His past clients include heavyweight boxing contender Ron Stander, former WWF World Champ, Bob Backlund and the local flower child wrestler, Jesse "The Body" Ventura.

When Sharkey first laid eyes on Hegstrand and Larinidas, he knew he was on to something. He recalls, "I walked into the Market Barbecue one night and the owner, Tony Bellacasa, called me over to his table. He was sitting with the most humongous monsters I've ever seen. I knew then we were on to something. Especially when I found out that these guys "loved to train all day and fight all night".

Their dedication was something to behold recalls Sharkey. Over a dozen began the classes and only four completed them. Sharkey remembers Larinidas coming to train while wearing a knee brace and using crutches. More than once other wrestlers dented Hegstrand's head with a chair. But neither missed a single day of the three month training.

The hard work has paid off ten fold for the Road Warriors. After only nine months together they have become the National Tag Team Champions, are seen weekly on the number one rated wrestling program from WTBS cable in Atlanta weekly, have earned well over $100,000 each, were named in a poll by over 42,000 fans as the tag team of the year in 1983 and have already been named to **Wrestling Scene's** list of top ten teams of the past ten years. One wrestling magazine went as far as saying that "the Road Warriors could be the greatest team in wrestling history and that "they are the one unbeatable team in professional wrestling."

Because of their immense popularity they are the National Wrestling Alliance's number one drawing card. They wrestle in major arenas only; Cincinnati, Atlanta, New Orleans, Cleveland, Baltimore, and Tampa. The Minneapolis Wrestling Club has tried to get them to wrestle locally but the Warriors are booked solidly for the next year.

In all the hoopla and rage, The Warriors have kept their cool and refuse to overlook their roots.

Explained Hegstrand in his first local interview ever, "My dad even travels with us from time to time. We don't want to get big headed or anything like that. We've made good money and are on our way to making more. When we get time to go to Japan we'll make even more. Hopefully we'll be able to retire by the time we're 30 and 32.

"And even though we live in Georgia now, we still call Minneapolis our home."

Hegstrand is "grateful to have the right break at the right time," but he'd been lifting weights for over five years daily. Thus he's paid his dues. He also cites Sharkey as the key to their success and "without him we'd still be bouncing at bars."

His partner, Larinidas, was a football fanatic. He played at Golden Valley and Moorehead State and was, as his nickname suggests, an "animal". He wanted to go professional but was laughed at by pro scouts as being "too short". Yet one could doubt that Tony Dorsett or Walter Payton would want to rumble with him now.

Added Hegstrand, "I was a mixed-up kid, not knowing what I wanted, or realizing how tough it can be in the world. I regretted not being a collegiate or professional athlete, and wrestling would be a good outlet."

Now, to prove himself he's defeating guys who he'd read about, seen on TV, and were legendary figures a short time ago. Guys like Wahoo McDaniel, Ole Anderson, Stan Hansen, Mr. Wrestling II, The Brisco Brothers, and The Junkyard Dog. They even have an open challenge out to Andre the Giant and Hulk Hogan.

In his best wrestling jargon, Hegstrand quipped, "Hey, let's face it, we can chop down anyone in front of us. Joe benchpresses 500 pounds with ease. Humans don't worry us. To us, it can be a big name or a nobody, but in our eyes they're just another pound of flesh, or a piece of meat to pound down."

And they've done that well. In over 100 tag bouts, The Warriors have been cleanly defeated just once. That by the popular Sawyer Brothers. A few days later they won the title back and hospitalized the Sawyers, as the story goes.

Both Larinidas and Hegstrand like the wrestling game and seem to handle it well. They've had sticks thrown at them, as well as beer, garbage, and even a knife, but look at these things simply as work hazards.

"There are some disadvantages to our personal lives," admits Hegstrand, "but we do get paid well."

When all is said and done, Hegstrand wants people to see him and Animal as guys who "were lucky but made their breaks" and just "regular guys who have no star egos."

They work out daily and wrestle four to six times weekly these days. In their free time they're recording a wild record, "The Ballad of The Road Warriors", and are working on an accompanying video.

But for now they'll keep going on their merry little path of physical destruction and wait for the chance to "come back home to the Cities. If not wrestle, then to live." ***

BEST OF THE QUOTEBOOK

Animal: "We pride ourselves on beating the system."

Hawk: "Remember, we're the guys who snack on danger and dine on death."

Hawk: "Every rep we do is with bad intentions."

TRAVEL AHEAD IN TIME

WHO WILL LEAD WRESTLING INTO THE NINETIES

1. **Paul E. Dangerously:** In just a short time this East Coast mastermind has made oodles of friends. He really has become a wrestling power broker who at the young age of 23 can already call his own shots.

Dangerously has great respect from "the boys", the press, and has the nerve to get things done. By 1991 he'll be able to walk into the WWF and name his price.

2. **Sam DiCero:** Chicago is a great city. Its people are street smart, gusty, and passionate. They refuse to be milked by out of towners. It kills a Chicagoan to pay for a New York wrestling carney and irks them as much to see real men with face paint lying about their home towns. Win or lose, they love folks from their own town and will support them.

Therefore Sammy DiCero has a fabulous chance at being a megapromoter of the future. Chicago can support it. Between Chicago, Milwaukee, Evansville, Peoria, Joliet, St. Louis, and small towns between, this former Maxx Brother is sitting on a gold mine.

3. **Dino Bravo & Rick Martel:** Montreal is a great sports town. It's not uncommon for the Paul Sauve Arena to host boxing cards that gross $250,000. In its heyday wrestling too commonly sold out. When Montreal is offered hometowners beating on foreigners, they pack houses. When the WWF takeover came on, they just flipped the bird to wrestling.

By the 90's, both Bravo and Martel will be sick of the WWF. They will go back home to promote. Bravo is well connected and will surely be welcomed back. If he and Martel can patch up their home town rivalry they'll work together. If not, Dino will do well on his own. The key here is the Canadians getting over.

4. **Bill Watts:** This conservative cowboy will not lay down forever. Because he appreciates the hard working American work ethic, the public will welcome him back. He and old pal Ken Mantell will do boffo business in Louisiana and Oklahoma. They may even merge with World Class. Champ Steve Williams will feud with former Tulsa boxer, Quick Tillis, Junkyard Dog Jr. and Ted DiBiase.

5. **Billy Anderson:** The man who trained Sting may retire due to back injuries. Then, come the nineties, he goes into business at the LA Forum with Dr. Buss. Darryl Nickels is named as the winner of the Stroh's World Cup. Numerous Mexican independents appear in the junior tournament which is won by Eddie Guerrero. Tapes are collector's items and crowds are way up. Once again, the abused, neglected area comes alive when pampered and treated properly, come the nineties.

6. **Tom Zenk:** Come the nineties, after winning the WWF Intercontinental Belt, Zenk goes berserk. He becomes the Muraco of the nineties. After making a career of pissing promoters off, he now does it to the fans. He becomes a great heel. As a negotiator, Zenk, too, does wonder. He has pressured Vince into giving him eight days off per month. Now he and Vinnie are best of buds. Both realize business is business.

7. **Dave Meltzer:** The wrestling powers won't give him his due, but the man is a mastermind and an idea maniac. When FOX TV decides to do their own promotion, Meltzer is hired as the producer. Filming is set for early-1993.

8. **Barry Owens:** Come the nineties, Dad becomes slightly ill due to the Billy Jack war. Before retiring, the old boy takes the million dollars he had buried in his backyard and tells Barry to "kick ass". Roddy Piper then defends his belt monthly and Tom Zenk is allowed to feud with him. Dynamite Kid and Dynamite Jr. (Danny Collins) are there too. Brady Boone is the TV champ and packs 'em in.

9. **Bruiser Brody:** The king of the independents will head the Outlaw Wresting Association. They will promote Texas and the West. Ted DiBiase, Terry Taylor, Nord, The Terminators, Justin Race, Funk, and The Fantastics will be at home here.

10. **Wade Keller:** Come the nineties, he is battling for the top share in the Kay Fabe sheet market. Keller is sharp, rarely wrong, and witty, but he's a bit critical and follows Japanese stuff a lot. The Torch continues to publish every other Thursday, come the nineties.

11. **Ed Sharkey:** No man in history has trained more main eventers. With Brady Boone, Derrick Dukes, Skip Luthor, Ricky Rice, and Rick Rude just to name a few, main eventing around the country, Shark is a proud papa. The Warriors, Jesse Ventura, Bob Backlund, Tom Zenk, The Warlord, Savannah Jack, Nikita Koloff, and Rick Steiner all are doing well too. Jesse will be the hilarious host of a late night talk show come the nineties. Eddie will continue training new superstars into the nineties.

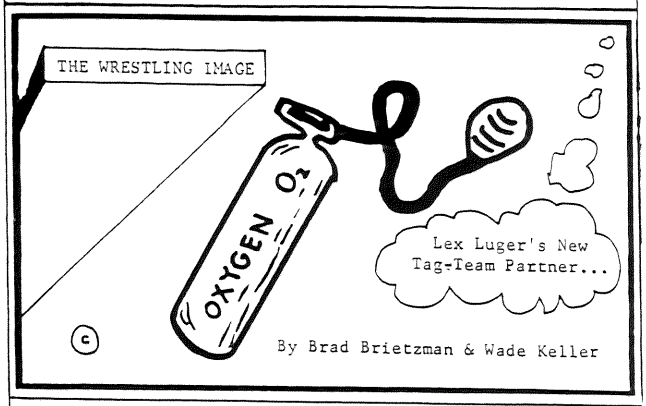
12. **Nasty Ronnie:** This Florida wildman rides the wave of the future in the WWF. He just beat out Diamond D (Dale Gagner), **Brad Breitzman**, and Wallace Weatherbee as manager of the year for 1992.

****

SINGLES(1990):

1) OWEN HART	11) TERRY GORDY
2) HIRO HASE	12) JOHNNY LOVE
3) DERRICK DUKES	13) LARRY CAMERON
4) BRAD ARMSTRONG	14) RIC FLAIR
5) BARRY WINDHAM	15) RANDY SAVAGE
6) KEIJI MUTOH	16) TONGA KID
7) BRIAN PILLMAN	17) DOUG FURNASS
8) CURT HENNIG	18) JEFF JARRETT
9) TOM ZENK	19) EDDIE GUERRERO
10) CHRIS CHAMPION	20) LEX LUGER

LOG: Owen Hart continues to marvel fans as he is defending the WWF belt in all countries. He has slowed down his style some and is reminiscent of a Ric Flair or vintage Bockwinkel...Hiro Hase continues to woo the Japanese with his flying antics... Dukes shocks the world by becoming the AWA Champion. Verne Gagne is pleased as Dukes is bringing in a new clientele which others have shunned for so long... Armstrong, Windham, and Hennig have been feuding over Brad's NWA Title Belt. The matches are always great...Chris Champion has become the NWA's answer to Randy Savage. He's outrageous but fun in a campy way. The off the wall Champion has invented a few moves... Larry Cameron continues to be Sam DiCero's Windy City Champion. Crowds are way up as he's battled off challenges by independents Jerry Lawler, Nord the Barbarian, Terry Gordy, and Darryl Nickels... Doug Furnass is the new "king" of Tennessee. His battles with Billy Travis, Jerry Lawler, and Scott Hall have drawn well. Hall and Jimmy Hart are funny together. Hart is the booker... Larry Cameron splits time between Japan, Chicago, and the AWA. He's still quite awesome. ***



BEST OF THE HOT NEWS

Since the first issue of The Pro Wrestling Torch Newsletter each newsletter has been led off with "The Hot News". Some have been funny, in some I played "creative booker", and others were indescribable. I always enjoyed writing these parodies. My goal was to fool first time readers into thinking it was true, and to entertain long time readers who knew it wasn't.

Some people liked the concept, some wished I used the space to utilize "real news",and others wanted to sue me for plagiarism. In any case, I have chosen several of my favorites and the readers' favorites to reprint, starting with the most talked about of all, the famous "Smokers" Hot News. If you haven't seen these yet, I hope you find them entertaining, and if you have seen some or all of these Hot News', I hope you find them worth re-reading.

"THE SMOKERS" (reprinted from the May 5, 1988 issue)

The Hot News this week comes from the UWF. A new tag team has surfaced with the greatest gimmick since "The Million Dollar Man" came upon the scene. The new tag team is made of two decent workers who wrestled for independents in the New York area. The two wrestled as a team and went by the names of Jack Highlight and Steve Hansen. Now they call themselves Winston and Camel, "The Smokers".

At the last tapings they came to the ring with cigarettes in their mouths and ring robes that look like packages of cigarettes. They are obviously heels. When they get to ringside, they travel around the ring like The Fantastics, but instead of shaking hands with the fans, they puff smoke in their faces.

When the ring robes come off, two men with Bob Orton-type physiques with tattoos all over their bodies are revealed. When they start to wrestle, they have to leave the ring often to catch their breath. The man who is on the ring apron smokes while waiting to be tagged in. When he is tagged in, he hands off the cigarette to his partner.

The UWF plans to use them as total opposites of role models. During interviews they cough and choke while smoking. They will lose a lot of their matches out of sheer exhaustion, but when they win, it will be due to cheating tactics. Vince McMahon doesn't want the kids to think that smokers are winners.

Just like when Ted DiBiase arrived in the UWF, there will be a series of skits to introduce this team to the public...

One of the skits will have The Smokers walk into a playground where a lot of kids are playing. The Smokers will walk up to the kids and ask them if they want a smoke. They will start coughing while telling them how good cigarettes make them feel. The kids will hesitantly accept the offer. The kids will take some whiffs and start coughing also. The Smokers will then present the kids with a carton of cigarettes and a lighter. They tell the kids to smoke all of them and that they will be back in one week with more. This skit will assuredly get the adults to hate them.

Another skit will see The Smokers in a singles bar. They will approach a lot of women and ask them if they would like a cigarette. They all laugh in their faces and tell them to get away. This is Vince's way of showing the kids that girls won't like them if they smoke.

Another skit will have them in a smoke-filled room, laughing and coughing, laughing and coughing. They will have something like five or six cigarettes in their mouths at once. This skit will gross everyone out and make the fans hate them even more.

The Smokers will be notorious for the metal cigarette that they pretend to smoke, but actually use against their opponents.

I understand that they are originally going to be managed by Jimmy Hart, and were at the last tapings. However, he will eventually get so disgusted with them that he will refuse to manage the two. After The Smokers become free agents, none other than Don Fargo will come upon the scene to manage them. Don Fargo is the veteran wrestler with tattoos covering his whole body and has a beer belly that would make Dick Murdoch jealous.

Fargo's Smokers, Winston and Camel, will feud with everyone from Strike Force to The Islanders. They will be so despicable that no team, even the heels, will want to be associated with them.

The long term plan, I'm told, is for Ted DiBiase to offer them one million dollars each to quit smoking. The Smokers will be shocked that someone would pay them to quit, especially such a large amount. Ted says that money can do anything, and everything, including getting The Smokers to quit smoking.

The Smokers will begin to wear T-shirts to the ring that say "We're part of the smoke-free generation". They will wrestle with toothpicks in their mouths instead of cigarettes. Ted won't manage them or anything like that, and he will continue to act like a heel. However, as The Smokers begin to improve their habit, the fans will start to cheer them on, if things go the way Titan hopes. Slowly, The Smokers will become fan favorites. They will change their name to "The Ex-Smokers." They will go on steroids and quickly appear to be in great shape. They will do all they can to look clean cut. They will become the most popular team in the UWF.

The big day will come when Ted DiBiase is to pay The Smokers, now turned "Ex-Smokers". Ted will arrive in the ring for a big presentation on TV of the million dollar checks. Ted will look at the team. He will walk around them and stare as he does so. Then he will grab the mic and laugh. He will tell The Ex-Smokers that they can't fool him. He claims that "The Ex-Smokers" and "The Smokers" are two completely different teams and that the real Smokers are out smoking somewhere. Ted will refuse to pay them. "The Ex-Smokers" will attack Ted, and a big feud will result between Ted DiBiase and "The Ex-Smokers".

Those are the tentative six-month plans for The Smokers. Titan has a tentative six-month plan for all its newcomers. Right now, all The Smokers have done is wrestled at last week's television tapings. The skits should start airing in a week or two. This is certainly one of the best angles and gimmicks of all-time. This is probably the most original tag team since The Road Warriors. The plans for them, assuming things don't change, should keep the UWF interesting over the next few months.

[**Editor's Note**: I received word just before going to press that the previous "Hot News" story was totally fictional. My source had just been smoking when telling me this story, and I don't mean cigarettes. I apologize for misleading you but it was too late to change my lead story. The gimmick is quite original, and might work, but it did not happen and there is no such team as "The Smokers". I hope this doesn't happen again. Next time I'll use a more reliable source.]

* *

Before Brother Earnest Angel, and before Brother Love, there was Reverend Adams. The following reprint is the fourth "Hot News" and maybe, just maybe, Brother Love and Brother Earnest wouldn't be around today if it wasn't for this article...

"THE MILLION DOLLAR PREACHER": (Reprinted from the November 19, 1987 issue)

The Hot News this week concerns "Gentleman" Chris Adams. Recently he left the UWF and Jim Crockett Promotions. He had started to wrestle for the World Class area out of Texas. Apparently he was going to wrestle for them and other independents. Well, this past weekend he signed with the UWF.

A reliable source has told me of the plans the UWF has for Chris Adams. The following paragraphs are those plans.

A few month ago Ted DiBiase left the UWF like Chris Adams, without a gimmick. When he entered the UWF, he became "The Million Dollar

Man". This ended up being the top gimmick so far this year.

Chris Adams left the UWF without a gimmick and has entered the UWF with quite a gimmick. Chris Adams is now "Reverend" Chris Adams. He is playing the part of television evangelist. He will come on TV and perform various miracles. One week he might make a blind person able to see again, and another week he might make Junkyard Dog a good wrestler. Then he will ask the people to send him money so he can continue to perform these miracles. He will have his "wife" next to him at all times. She will be called Tammy Adams, but is better known as Baby Doll or Nikila Roberts. Tammy will be at Chris' side all the time crying with her make-up running all over.

Ted DiBiase will enter into this situation when he gets "injured". He will announce that his wrestling career is over due to this serious neck injury he acquired. Chris will offer his services to Ted for a certain fee. The next week, Ted will come out in regular street clothes without Virgil by his side and will be wearing a neck brace. Then Chris will come out with diamonds and gold jewelry and will have Virgil by his side. Reverend Adams will go on to heal DiBiase and then go on to call Ted DiBiase, "The Million Dollar Debt Man".

The next week Ted comes out and takes exception to Chris' references. He admits that money doesn't make a wrestler, skill does. He also admits what a jerk he had been for all of these months. Ted asks for the fans' forgiveness and declares war on Chris Adams.

The two men fight all over the country. Before each of the matches they will bet each other money on who wins the bout. Thanks to Virgil's interference, Ted loses almost all of the matches. Ted will go into seclusion for a month and come back as "The Million Dollar Man" again. He will have a new bodyguard who will be called Fritz. Fritz is actually going to be Savannah Jack. Ted DiBiase will say he became rich again due to some slick stock investing. This time, however, he will be a babyface and throw money to the ringside fans and not make them do anything for it. He and Chris will have their first rematch since Ted became rich again at Wrestlemania Four.

Those are all the details I have at this point. Those plans obviously could change, but it sounds like a hot feud and I doubt they will change it. Stay tuned in the weeks to come for more updates on Chris Adams in the UWF.

[**Editor's Note**: Just before publishing I was informed that my source was mistaken and that the preceding story was entirely fictional. I apologize for misleading you, but it was too late to change my lead story. I hope this doesn't happen again!]

* *

I've also taken my share of shots at the various "outstanding" personalities in "office positions", those being Fritz Von Erich, Dusty Rhodes, and Verne Gagne. The following "Hot News" was written right after Fritz Von Erich had his infamous fake heart attack. I found out "the real story", and quickly made it public...

"The Real Story": (Reprinted from the January 28, 1988 issue)

The Hot News this week concerns Fritz Von Erich. As most of you know, he was attacked by The Freebirds last month and supposedly had a heart attack as the result. We all thought this was simply an angle to get the Von Erich-Freebird war going again. Well, there is more to it.

Fritz Von Erich was to be strapped to Gary Hart at ringside while his son, Kerry, fought Al Perez for the World Class Title. Before the match could start, Fritz found himself victim of a freebird attack. Gary Hart and Al Perez watched as Fritz was annihilated. Finally Kevin and Kerry made the save. They helped Fritz out of the cage and down the aisle. On his way to the dressing room, he collapsed. He had a fake heart attack. Then "he was taken to the hospital" and was listed in critical condition (we've known that for years!). We all thought that it was only an angle, but I have been told by a doctor, who will remain anonymous, that there was more to it. I've been informed that the hospital stay was for real.

While a disguised-healthy Fritz was being taken to the ambulance, he actually did have a heart attack. It was due to natural causes and had nothing to do with the attack. Apparently when the door to the ambulance shut, Fritz didn't get up. Kerry told his dad that the fans were all gone and that he could get up now. Little did Kerry know, but the cute little angle backfired, and Fritz did actually have a heart attack.

When Kerry finally did realize that Fritz wasn't faking, he went crazy. He ordered the ambulance to get to Baylor Medical as quickly as possible. The paramedics kept Fritz alive. When he got to the hospital, he was rushed to the emergency room. The doctors soon concluded that something was stopping the bloodflow from the heart. Fritz was immediately taken into surgery.

The surgery took thirty-eight hours. One hour was actually fixing his heart, while the other thirty-seven were spent trying to find it. According to the doctors, they had never seen anything like it. The doctor told me they started to think that Fritz had no heart (we wrestling fans have known that for years!)

In the thirty-seven hours of searching, the doctors discovered something peculiar. Fritz's blood was brown. After a chemical test, the make-up of Fritz's blood was determined to be similar to that of mud. You know, the stuff pigs roll around in (this explains Fritz's obsession with mud matches). Inside of his blood, they discovered little organisms called "fibbs". They are little sacs filled with a liquid that can only be seen under a microscope. They apparently cause extreme pain unless they are destroyed by the circulatory system. The only way to destroy a "fibb" is to tell a lie. Every time a lie is told, the pain from one of the "fibbs" is relieved. It is estimated that people born with this rare disease start with 3000 trillion of them. Well, Fritz has only one trillion left. That means that Fritz has told 2999 trillion lies in his life! But who could blame him if it makes him feel better.

On the 37th hour, the doctors found Fritz's heart. It was located near the area he uses to sit on. They needed a magnifying glass to see it. Anyway, after opening up the heart, they discovered the reason for the stoppage of the blood (or mud). Blocking the left ventricle was none other than Lord Little Brook, the famous midget wrestler. Somehow he ended up in Fritz's heart. Anyway, Lord Little Brook ran away from the doctors before they could ask him how he got there. Brook quickly scurried out of the hospital and was seen fleeing the scene with none other than Verne Gagne and Jim Crockett. Maybe that is the promoter's way of eliminating the competition, and that was an original way! Fritz was sewn up and was back to his "normal self".

The next week the story was changed, and on the World Class TV show they claimed that Fritz didn't have a heart attack, but rather some kind of paralysis. If they said he had a heart attack, then Mark Lowrance would be telling the truth, and they just couldn't let that happen.

Now you know the truth behind the Fritz Von Erich heart attack incident. This story is an exclusive. I managed to get the true story from one of the doctors who performed surgery on him. I would like to thank him for the story, and I hope he doesn't have to treat anymore Von Erichs in the near future.

[**Editor's Note**: Just before going to press, I was informed that the source of this story is spending his time at a different type of hospital. The doctor who told me this story is now a patient at a Dallas mental hospital. I understand that the previous "Hot News" story is totally fictional. I'm sorry for misleading you, but can't I even trust a doctor anymore?]

* *

We all have our idea of what we would like to see in a promotion. Well, I took the opportunity to make it seem as if my "ideal league" had indeed come true. The following Hot News article explains what happened when Bill Watts decided to get back into wrestling...

"The Cowboy Returns" (Reprinted from the January 14, 1988 issue.)

The Hot News this week concerns a "new" promotion based in Texas. As most of you know, Ken Mantel bought Fritz Von Erich's 50% share of World Class. Kerry and Kevin held the other 50% of the shares... as of last week. The Von Eriche sold their last 50% to everybody's favorite cowboy. Yes, Bill Watts is back!

It didn't take long for the team of "Cowboy" Bill Watts and Ken Mantel to take effect. Mantel had all but merged Wild West Wrestling (WWW), and World Class (WCWA). Then Watts came into the picture and immediately merged the two completely and changed the name. Folks, the UWF is back! UWF now stands for The United Wrestling Federation, rather than Universal. Since Jim Crockett has the rights to Universal, they went with United (which a lot people called it anyway).

A lot of changes have taken place already. First, the WCWA Title was eliminated and a tournament was scheduled to determine a new UWF World Champion. Some incredible names have already been announced for the tournament. Some of the big names include Steve "Dr. Death" Williams, Hacksaw Duggan, Stan Hansen, Bruiser Brody, Sgt. Slaughter, Larry Cameron, Skip Luthor, Abdullah the Butcher, Kamala, Akira Maeda, Terry Gordy, Terry Taylor, Eddie Gilbert and Curt Hennig. Also in the tournament are most of the WWW and WCWA regulars.

Williams left the NWA after months of frustration in the NWA as they buried him week after week. He brought the old UWF belt with him, which is the prize for the UWF tourney. Duggan is here after being fired for hitting Vince McMahon on national television. Taylor and Gilbert had threatened to leave before, and this was their perfect opportunity. They didn't like the treatment they were getting in the NWA, and they are sure to get a good push here. Curt Hennig walked out on the AWA when Verne was planning on having him do a job. This was no ordinary job. He was asked to do a job for Verne himself. When Curt heard that, he was gone. Brody and Hansen agreed to wrestle here exclusively while in the US, and allowing them ample tours of Japan. Cameron and Luthor are two PWA guys who have a lot going for them, and Watts and Mantell saw this in them. Watts is obviously going with the same theme as he did with the old UWF last year. He's referring to the new UWF as the toughest federation today. Of course it just wouldn't be the UWF without Jim Ross doing announcing. His contract with Jim Crockett expired and he quickly signed with the UWF instead. The Von Eriche were offered a position as jobbers by Watts. They refused, and have gone to their first love, drugs. That is, they have opened a drug store in Texas.

A tag team tournament is being held also. Included in the tournament are the Fantastics, The Terminators, The New Breed, Tanaka and Diamond, The Sheepherders, The Lightning Express, Parsons and Buddy Roberts, and Victory & Tatum. The Lightning Express brought the UWF Tag-Team straps with them, which were abandoned by the NWA late last year. Bill Watts also signed the best batch of managers ever put together. He has signed Diamond D, Downtown Bruno, Gary Hart, Johnny V, Scandar Acbar, and Paul E. Dangerously. It was rumored that he was trying to sign Jim Cornette, but that's doubtful.

Bill Watts has also managed to get a lot of syndication for his new shows. A lot of stations are dropping The Wrestling Network as soon as their contracts run out in favor of Watts' shows. They must remember the ratings that they had when the UWF was run by Watts. It took only one year for Crockett and company to kill the television show. Apparently he is going to run the same type of shows with all main events. However, he plans to finish every main event on TV, or else show the conclusion the next week. He obviously has come to the conclusion that television ratings are the first step to a successful promotion.

He also plans to solve the problems of people not attending the arena shows because they're satisfied with the matches on TV. Before every card there will be an autograph session with all of the wrestlers. He plans on having general seats at or around four dollars, so people can afford to come. From there, he'll also do the localized interviews, something that the NWA stopped doing and shouldn't have. These three ideas could solve their problems of low attendance. If their wrestlers actually work hard, then he could take over Titan's number one spot.

One might ask how he can afford to have low ticket prices, and how he can afford all of the top names he has. Well, he has gotten a big-money backer. Bum Bright is back, and is giving pro wrestling one more chance. When he found out that Fritz was out of World Class (atleast to a certain extent), he was eager to try again.

Watts is immediately going to hold shows around the country. He is going to put extra effort into the Central States region, The Twin Cities, and Florida. All of which are dead as far as wrestling goes. Watts is determined to bring them back to life.

Watts decided to get back into wrestling after Jim Crockett failed to come through with the long term agreements that originally convinced Watts to leave the business. Watts and Mantell have obviously gone over the mistakes that were made with the old UWF, and have learned from them. I have the feeling that the new UWF is going to give good ol' Vince some sleepless nights. 1988 may not be that bad after all!

[**Editor's Note**: I just received word that my source's source's source was simply stating what he hoped would happen, and through the translations, came off as being true. I apologize for misleading you but maybe it will come true. However, the previous story was fictional.]

* *

Last and probably least is the "Blackmail" Hot News article. It was written right after Baby Doll introduced the plain, brown envelope, claiming there were incriminating photos of Dusty Rhodes in them. I wondered what it would be like if Baby Doll really did have photos of Dusty Rhodes. What fun could come out of that situation? The following is a reprint of the controversial "Blackmail In People's Court" Hot News...

"Blackmail In People's Court" (Reprinted from the February 25, 1988 issue)

The Hot News this week concerns blackmail. As most of you know, on the 1/30 edition of World Championship Wrestling, Baby Doll presented Dusty Rhodes with a plain brown envelope and told him there was a lot more where that came from. Dusty took an uneasy glance into the envelope and then walked away. Tony Shiavone couldn't even ask him what was in it.

At first everybody assumed this was just an angle, an original and refreshing one at that. However, inside sources told me that this angle stems from some behind the scenes situations. The original blackmail incident was unplanned and legit.

As I understand, Dusty Rhodes was so pissed off at Baby Doll for taking this public that he took her to court... The People's Court. Dusty not only was out for revenge in real life, but thought being on television would make wrestling seem like it is legitimate.

Apparently there is a three to four month delay on the airing of People's Court so it

won't hit the air waves until April or May. My source attended the actual live hearings and gave me the following report.

Doug Lou-L-N introduced Dusty Rhodes as the theme music played... Do Da Da... Do Da Da Da... Dusty was suing Baby Doll for the maximum of 1500 dollars for malicious and false blackmail. With him he carried the infamous plain brown envelope.

Next Doug Lou-L-N introduced the defendant in the case. Baby Doll (Nikila Roberts) entered the courtroom with her husband, Sam Houston (Sam Roberts), James J. Dillon, and a surprise witness, Verne Gagne as the music played... Do Da Da... Do Da Da Da... A counter-suit for 1500 dollars and Dusty Rhodes execution was announced. Dusty acted shocked when he heard the counter-suit, but smiled in confidence.

Judge Whopper entered the courtroom. The litigants were sworn in. Judge Whopper started with Dusty. He asked him what the blackmail incident was all about. Dusty said that Baby Doll presented him pictures of somebody who looked like him. The judge asked him what the pictures were of. He said that he couldn't say, for it would incriminate him.

Judge Whopper asked Baby Doll if she was blackmailing Dusty. Baby Doll said that she wasn't and left it at that. The judge asked Baby Doll if she presented him with pictures and asked for something in return for the rest. She said no and left it at that.

Judge Whopper said that he heard enough and went on to discuss the counter-suit. He asked Baby Doll why she was suing Dusty for 1500 and asking for him to be killed. She said that Dusty has ruined her marriage. She went on to talk about how the one night she spent with Dusty was the worst night of her life. She said that she will never be able to have kids because of the psychological damage done that night. Verne Gagne, one of Baby Doll's witness', called out in agreement.

Judge Whopper, who seemed irritated by the interruption, asked Verne what he agreed about. Verne said that the one night he spent with Dusty ruined his sex life too, and that it was indeed the most terrible night of his life. Verne went on to shout across the courtroom to Dusty. He asked him something to the effect that he was wondering if Dusty ever found his other sock. Dusty buried his red face into his hands and shook his head in disgust and embarrassment.

All of a sudden every woman in the audience started agreeing that the night they spent with Dusty was indeed the worst night they have experienced too.

Judge Whopper looked disgusted. He went on to ask Sam Houston what he was there to say. He said that he was there to attest to the fact that his wife's "performance" went way down since being a valet for Dusty.

Judge Whopper asked JJ Dillon what he was doing in court and JJ said he was there to watch.

Judge Whopper asked Dusty if he had anything to say. He said that he never did find Verne's sock. He also said that Nikila enjoyed the night with him, and said he enjoyed it too. JJ added that to him it didn't seem like Baby Doll wanted to be with Dusty that night, and that Dusty was the only one of the two to enjoy it.

The judge asked him how he knew. JJ's face turned red and then he claimed it was just a guess.

Dusty then added that the night with Verne was not as bad as Verne made it out to be.

Judge Whopper took a short recess. Five minutes later he came out and asked Dusty to follow him to his chamber. Dusty did so. A little over 30 minutes later they re-entered the courtroom.

Dusty took his position at the podium. Judge Whopper said that he had made his decision. The judge said that in the main case he was ruling with the defendant. He said that Baby Doll's testimony was so strong that he believes no blackmail took place. As far as the counter-suit went, he ruled in favor of Dusty. His only explanation was that Dusty wasn't that bad. Dusty argued about the first decision saying that it was obvious Baby Doll was blackmailing him. The judge agreed but added that there is no one in the world who looks like Dusty, so to protect him from the pictures being shown, he ruled that there was no blackmail.

Judge Whopper flailed the hammer, and court was adjourned. As Judge Whopper was leaving for his chamber, my source noticed that he had only one sock on.

Well now you know the inside story on the Dusty Rhodes-Baby Doll blackmail incident. Who knows if Baby Doll will continue to blackmail Dusty. However, it is now apparent that Dusty will have a hard time proving anything.

My source tells me that this incident is scheduled for an airing date around the beginning of April, so get your VCR's ready, because this is something to save.

[**Editor's Note**: Just before going to press, I was informed by my source that the previous story was all made up. He claimed that Vince McMahon had blackmailed him to say that. He found out that Vince's threats were pretense, so he revealed the truth to me. I apologize for misleading you, but the previous Hot News story was totally fictional. I would like to personally apologize to anyone in this story who may have been offended. It was too late to change my lead story. I hope this doesn't happen again.]

THE BEST OF THE QUOTEBOOK
Featuring Jim Cornette

"I now introduce to you, the human highlight film of professional wrestling, The Midnight Express."

(Concerning a jobber): "What you just saw there is an example of what happens when the fetus doesn't get enough oxygen."

"Dusty, you've got a mouth full of memories that you can't back up anymore."

(Concerning The Mighty Wilbur): "The man is so big, if you stuck a pin in him he'd blow up."

(Concerning Stan Lane): "Ya' know, you could strap a Time-X watch to his face and it wouldn't break because he can take a lickin' and keep on tickin'."

"Bob Caudle, I'd like to run into you at a shopping center... while I'm driving and you're walking."

(To Jim Ross): "Jim, if you feel as lousy on the inside as you look on the outside, then you need a hospital, man."

(To David Crockett): "Working for your family is like working for an unemployment agency."

(Concerning The Mighty Wilbur): "He's so fat he makes a beepin' noise when he moves backwards."

"I don't hate David Crockett. I just hate the guy that turns on his microphone."

(Concerning a battered Stan Lane): "Don't let him fool you. He's just lulling the man into a false sense of security."

"Dusty Rhodes, every delivery boy in Austin, Texas knew the color of your mama's bedroom."

"The mayor gave me the key to the city; then he went around and changed all the locks."

"There are women crawling all over this arena like ants on a log of sugar just waiting for Sweet Stan to finish his match."

"I've got a mouth and I'm good."

"Here they are, the men every woman in this audience would like to molest, The Midnight Express."

(Concerning a luncheon): "We we were going to invite Muhammad Ali but they already had broccoli; they didn't need another vegetable."

(To the NWA): "Then you go out there to the McMorton Preschool Center and you get those cuddly, gorgeous, cute Fantastics."

"We're going to go through all those teams like Ex-Lax goes through Wonder Woman until they get there."

(To David Crockett): "Shut up idiot."

(To David Crockett): "Handicap was a word coined with you in mind."

(To David Crockett): "Shut-up David. I didn't pull your string."***

EVEN HEROES DIE

BRUISER BRODY-- THE LOST INTERVIEW

EVEN HEROES DIE! by Ray Whebbe Jr.

Everyone has a hero. Frank Donald Goodish a.k.a. "King Kong" Bruiser Brody was mine. What Brody stood for is the stuff Nobel prizes are won by. He refused to take shit from any man, system, or promoter. He chiseled out his own living, his own way, and was a true man. To beginning wrestlers he was considerate. To hardcore fans he was gracious and appreciative of their concerns. To promoters he could be 290 lbs. of pure terror. When treated unfairly he went berserk.

Brody also had a great sense of humor. One time in Atlanta he tipped a fan out of a wheel chair, stuffed a prelim guy into it and wheeled the man into the ringpost. He later told friends he was fired for the action but never regretted it.

Brody refused to sell out. His lucrative paychecks in Japan assured he would not have to. Was he famous in Japan? You bet! A group of Japanese businessmen once told me Bruiser Brody was as famous as anyone in their country. When B.B. walked down the street in Japan it wasn't unusual that people would be fearful and walk on the other side of the street.

In arenas Brody appeared reckless. He destroyed arenas. Once he poured nacho cheese sauce on Abdullah's head. In Japan and Puerto Rico he mastered out-of-ring brawls. These brawls were much copied but never duplicated. To the untrained eye Brody was scary. The Japanese would clear entire aisles when he entered an arena. In reality he was a master strategist.

In 1987 Brody was winding down a great career. Maybe it was road weariness. Maybe it was too much Von Erich closeness.

But in 1988 ol' B.B. was back to his old self. And did the fans ever like that. In both Puerto Rico and Japan fans rewarded him by barking along with this legend. Maybe they knew it was his swan song. Then again maybe they just accepted his greatness. After all it took the world many years to appreciate Bach, Von Gogh or Plato.

While Bruiser Brody appeared maniacal he was a decent, warm, compassionate man. Whenever he saw a new PWA guy he would go out of his way to say hello. He liked to introduce himself as Frank. The giant also never shunned a newcomer's questions, nor a fan's.

Brody liked the independent promoters and the spirit that lived in most newsletters. He would politely listen to hardcore fans discuss their theories on wrestling and graciously give them his. B.B. knew the importance of kafabe sheets and never made a member of that fraternity feel like less than an equal.

He had his tastes of big promotions early in his career as he toured with the WWF. He also spent time in the NWA and AWA. His stints usually ended after an argument with someone. Unfortunately his life ended that way.

Yet one can't help but think men like Brody haven't got choices. His powers, talents, and energy were godsent. To suppress these things would be tragic. Brody was chosen, not made. And though he certainly would appreciate our sadness over his death, Frank Donald Goodish could live no other way.

"KING KONG" BRUISER BRODY

(Photo Courtesy Norman Kietzer)

THE LOST INTERVIEW WITH BRUISER BRODY
By Ray Whebbe

(This interview was originally done in the summer of 1987.)

Ray Whebbe: Hello Frank. It's always good to see the king of the independents.

Bruiser Brody: Thanks, but don't get too excited about the king stuff. You never know, the next time you see me you might be mad at me. I might be in the WWF and you'll be calling me a sell-out.

Whebbe: Never! No matter what you do I could never call you a sellout. After all, you've done everything you can to keep the independents healthy and yet earn a living. If you wanted to make big money in the WWF, I'd never hold it against you.

Brody: Thanks again. You never know for sure. For now I'm happy to work independently. Me and Abby make a decent living as will Nord and I. It's no secret I like to help the little guy. But sometimes money is important.

Whebbe: You seem to head back to the Twin Cities constantly to help the little guy.

Brody: I guess when I first came to the AWA it was to help Wally Karbo fight the wrestling war! After all, he was a guy who was about 70 years old and in threat of losing what he lived for.

Whebbe: You also worked for Sharkey's PWA and Dave Strecker.

Brody: I always try to help out. Wrestling needs promoters.

Whebbe: You also seem to give the ailing World Class group help as well!

Brody: Sometimes. I don't know why. The Mike Von Erich funeral and selling tickets and all was incredibly disgusting.

Whebbe: You're a former sportswriter, Frank. Do you ever miss writing.

Brody: Yes.

Whebbe: Will you ever write a book on your life in wrestling?

Brody: I don't know. Sayama (Tiger Mask) wrote a book on his career. It's thought by printing companies that wrestling fans won't read books.

Whebbe: Maybe it's because most wrestling books are fictitious.

Brody: True. Maybe if there was a market for the book I would do it.

ZENK PROVES TO BE PRO WRESTLING'S HIGH PLAINS DRIFTER

Whebbe: Do you see a lot of talent in the independents?

Brody: Sure. Look at these kids, The Fantastics. They're great. The PWA has some talent too.

Whebbe: At least the independents "put out". Will you return to Japan soon?

Brody: I think so. I'm waiting for the right offer. Maybe I'll wrestle Inoki for $100,000 or I may go to Baba.

Whebbe: Travelling every night must wear you out. Wouldn't it be easier just to join a group?

Brody: I don't think so. As an independent I can wrestle when I want. Right now I like to wrestle just three nights a week. I have a kid at home, a son, I want to see grow up. I just got him some Transformers. I'd rather watch my son than wrestle most nights.

Whebbe: But you are one of the all-time greats.

Brody: Thank you.

Whebbe: And now you're training Nord the Barbarian to follow in your footsteps.

Brody: And I'm excited about John. He's come a long way and has perfected many of my moves. Can you imagine the fans enjoyment when they see two guys out there our size with the same styles feuding. And the feud is inevitable. But let me tell you this. I may teach Nord a lot of tricks, but he'll never be quite like the teacher. I won't nor can teach him everything.

Whebbe: Is Nord the right man to teach?

Brody: Definitely. It doesn't matter if you drink or anything away from the ring. What you do in the ring is what wrestling promoters care about and in the ring Nord has it. Right now we're starting our feud in World Class. It should be wild.

Whebbe: What about Abdullah?

Brody: He's a guy who can do fine without me but I don't think we'll ever quit our feud.

Whebbe: You've played a lot of football. What about other sports like boxing.

Brody: I've always been fascinated by boxing. It's a great sport. You were involved in boxing, right?

Whebbe: I promoted, worked corners, and managed fighters for seven years. If you think wrestling's a work, boxing would shock you. It seems that a lot of boxing matches are either fixed or "set-up" to a certain degree. Problem is, when it's a work, they think it's real.

Brody: I've heard that. Boxers generally make poor wrestlers. They can't seem to get that ego thing straight. They also look at it as a comedown.

Whebbe: What about football players?

Brody: They make better wrestlers than boxers. Maybe it's because most of them weren't big NFL stars.

Whebbe: Good point. If you're big and can't be a NFL star, what else can you do? Bounce, I guess.

Brody: I've bounced too.

Whebbe: Thanks again Frank. See ya' soon and keep up the great work. ***

ZENK PROVES TO BE PRO WRESTLING'S HIGH PLAINS DRIFTER by Ray Whebbe Jr.

Tom Zenk may very well be the most misunderstood athlete I've ever met. Some say he's a dopehead. Other called him a wimp. Yet others said he had no talent.

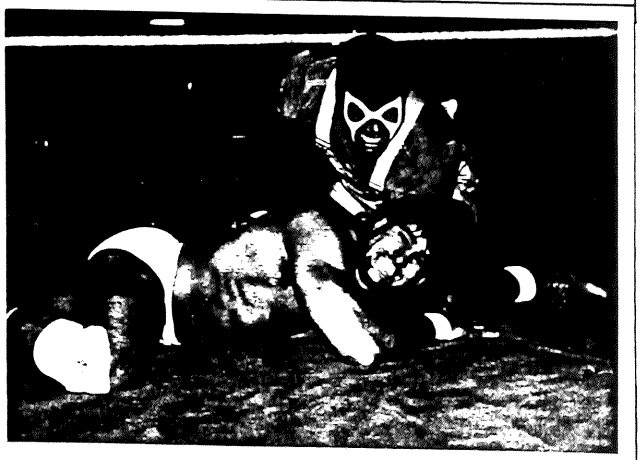
On the positive side, he's a former Mr. Minnesota, has a marketing background, will bounce in a pinch, and refuses to "sell-out".

As for the negative rumors, he finds them humorous. As for talent, those who scoff at him are sour grapes. As for being wimpy, that's a joke! Tom Zenk has been in the rings with hundreds of so-called monsters including Kimala, King Tonga, The Road Warriors, Steve DiSalvo, Mr. Saito, and the top All-Japan grapplers. A fearful man he is not.

Tom Zenk left the WWF his way. Many would kill for the chance to be there. Other wish they had the guts to leave. On a recent "Saturday Night Ringside" television interview with Mick Karch, he stated pubicly that he left the WWF for the same reason that many top athletes leave any pro team- over a contract dispute. He denied that he was a quitter, as billed by Rick Martel and the WWF.

As a wrestler, Zenk has paid his dues. In his four years of grappling he's developed into one of the top babyfaces in the world. Image-wise, he has it all- a good rap, looks, and a body. Most women find him sexy, yet most men find him the kind of guy they'd like to have a beer with.

In this Torch interview you'll get a look at one of our favorite wrestlers, and one of our favorite men. Those who are fortunate enough to know Tom know him to be a great family man, a hard worker, straight shooter, a good friend, and one helluva' guy. He's a real 80's man inspite of the fact that he does eat quiche. In this special Torch interview we're sure you'll begin to understand why Zenk really is "the High Plains Drifter" of pro wrestler.



MR. DESTRUCTION ARMBARS TOM ZENK (Photo by Wade Keller)

Whebbe: In all my years in sports writing I've never met a more misunderstood talent.

Zenk: In many ways, Ray, I guess you could call me misunderstood.

Whebbe: I've heard some people say they were upset with your image as a fan favorite. Others say you've made it on looks.

Zenk: I like the fans' support and all but let's face the facts. I wrestle for the money. If the fans like me, great. If not, it's okay too. In fact, I think I'd make a great heel.

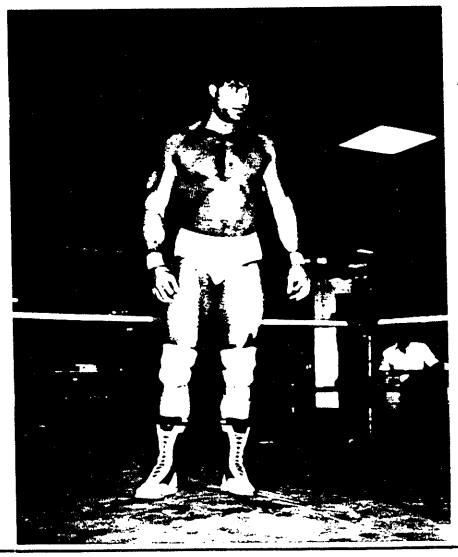
As for my looks, c'mon. I've first got to thank my parents for that. But I work hard in the gym and work hard to show that I have more heart and character than your average pretty face. Don't get me wrong, I respect a guy who works hard to have a great body, but if he can't stand up for himself or his friends and family, he's nothing.

Whebbe: In all fairness to you Tom, you've gone on the road, wrestled all kinds of foes, and won titles almost everywhere you've gone. So you must have more than average talent.

Zenk: I appreciate the compliment, Ray. The "kayfabe" sheets and magazines have always been fair to me. My willingness to go on the road and work for smaller groups has helped as well.

Whebbe: How did you like working for the AWA?

Zenk In the beginning it was fun. There were guys like Abdullah, Brody, The Warriors, Martel, and Bockwinkel all here. How couldn't it be great? The crowds were up and payoffs were fine.



TOM ZENK

(Photo by Wade Keller)

Whebbe: And then you moved to the Pacific Northwest. There you made a big hit and were the only man ever to hold both their singles and tag team belts at once.

Zenk: I loved working for the Owens. The payoffs weren't always great, but I usually made it back with selling my pictures. When I left it was just time to move on.

Whebbe: But when you returned this year, things were far from perfect.

Zenk: Things just didn't work out. I wrestle for one reason now and that's money. If we can't come to an agreement on a guarantee, I can't stick around. No hard feelings. It's just business.

Whebbe: I also know you try to be a fair man. If a promoter is struggling, you won't kill him with exorbitant demands.

Zenk: Sure, I try to be fair. But when dealing with promoters who want my body to be abused for their pockets, I want a fair share.

Whebbe: And you weren't treated fairly in the WWF?

Zenk: I'd rather not talk about it because if things could be worked out, I'd return. But it wasn't always great there. Martel was paid more than I, and I was never allowed to deal with Vince face to face. Rather than be a crybaby or troublemaker, I just left.

Whebbe: Amazing. You left a six figure job per year and will still wrestle on one hundred dollar cards.

Zenk: I'm big on principles. If there's a $1500 house and I make a hundred or two, that's very fair. Fifty dollars for a major TV event does not seem fair.

Whebbe: So what are your plans for the rest of 1988?

Zenk: Wow, I have a lot going on. I have a great job with my ex-partner, Scott Doring. We're bodyguards and security guards. That's been fun.

I also have some health club endorsement offers, a movie offer and enjoy working on independent cards. I'm also heading for Japan in August.

Whebbe: With the tragic loss of Brody, the independents will be hurt.

Zenk: Not just the independents but the world. Frank was a real man... a man's man and there aren't many left in wrestling, Ray. It's very sad to see a guy like Frank go down. But it goes to show you things in wrestling aren't all that good. Adonis gets killed driving around Podunk, Canada and Brody in Puerto Rico. And they were trying to earn money to put food on their families' tables.

Whebbe: You often pop up on PWA cards. They seem to be fun. Are they?

Zenk: Yeah, I just wrestled Larry "The Butcher" Cameron and it was a great match. The fans are always fun and the group always gives a good account of themselves. It's just too bad they got messed up with the IWA. With the money those guys blew, more should have been accomplished.

Whebbe: Did you enjoy your recent tour of Europe?

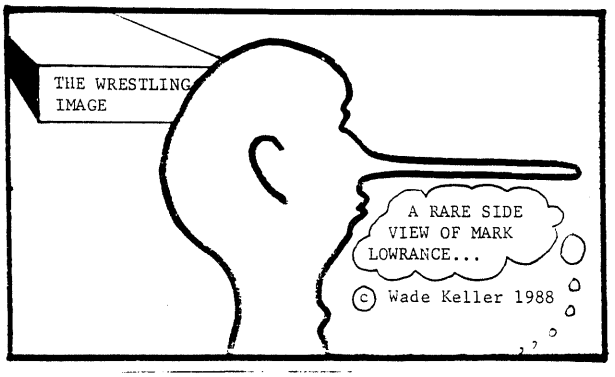
Zenk: It was an experience to say the least. The bus rides were horrendous and fans didn't know what to expect. I could fill a page on the negatives, but why? It was fun wrestling Afa the Samoan, and teaming with Derrick Dukes was always a thrill. Dukes has everything it takes to be a star-talent, fine size and flying abilities. I hope the promoters don't keep him down because he's black. If somewhere down the line we could team in the AWA or Japan I'd love it!

Whebbe: So returning to the AWA is not totally out of the question?

Zenk: No, no way. I'd love to be wrestling around Minnesota. But I also want to be used right. Not for my ego but for my paycheck. The higher up on the card I am, the more I'd get paid. Being in a feud with Curt Hennig would be great for me, Curt, and the AWA. I know Verne and he knows me. Hopefully we can talk about this one day.

Whebbe: Do you have any advice to budding wrestlers or fans?

Zenk: Be true to yourself. Set goals and go after them. Wrestling may not be a great career. It's a good hobby and sideline but don't take it seriously. Whatever your dreams are though, go get them. ***



KELLER'S MID-YEAR PICKS

KELLER'S MID-YEAR PICKS

WRESTLER OF THE MID-YEAR

I have got to go with Ted DiBiase first. He has been at the top of all the WWF's major angles since the year began. He has had some great matches with Randy Savage around the country. His interviews are fantastic. If his workrate continues to be superb, and he continues to have great matches with almost everyone he steps in the ring with, he will keep his top spot come the end of the year. My second pick is the readers' first pick: Randy Savage. Although his quality of matches are inconsistent, he has gotten over in the WWF without being compared to Hulk Hogan. Savage could easily be on top at the end of the year. Third has to go to Ric Flair. He continues to have great matches with everyone he faces. He has kept drawing as World Champion in the NWA even though his act is somewhat stale, which is a credit to his talent. Fourth place goes to Curt Hennig who has been the top man in the AWA all year, and continued to be one of, if not the, top worker in the country. His very recent jump to Titan could make the first half of the year in the AWA seem invisible, but given the right push in the WWF, he could be the darkhorse for wrestler of the year.

TAG TEAM OF THE MID-YEAR

The Midnight Express is my first pick. Their matches with any team are consistently great. They are colorful, and having Jim Cornette as your manager can't hurt. Second place goes to their opponents through most of this year, The Fantastics. Their workrate has gotten them over in the NWA and they were a very good replacement for The Rock and Roll Express. Their matches with The Midnight Express and The Sheepherders were great. Third has to go to Badd Company, Pat Tanaka and Paul Diamond. They lack size and early in their career lacked color. They combined forces, however, and became AWA World Champions. Pat Tanaka is a phenomenal wrestler. Paul Diamond is a solid worker. I think they would (and did) work a lot better with Downtown Bruno, rather than "Giant" Dallas Page. Fourth goes to The Midnight Rockers in a surprise. They had some good matches in the AWA and their recent move to the WWF, so far, has been successful. I feel they are a big part of the future of Titan.

ROOKIE OF THE MID-YEAR

Although he lacks the exposure of say, Ricky Rice or even Max Pain, he is the best of the current sparse crop of rookies this year. Derrick Dukes has so much raw talent and desire that the use the AWA is making of him is wasteful. However, the little TV time he did get on ESPN was enough for the fans to recognize him at the spot shows he goes to. Hopefully he will be a big part of the AWA in the second half of the year. Second goes to Max Pain who is a rookie that has held the Southern Title for much of the year. He has potential, and already has the Hogan-type power moves down. Third goes to Ricky Rice, and what the heck, in a three way tie for fourth place is Rocky Mountain Thunder, Solomon Grundy, and Mighty Wilbur.

PROMOTION OF THE MID-YEAR

The WWF has got to be number-one, simply because they are. They are the best run promotion in all of wrestling. They continue to draw well in most cases, and continue to get the top talent from other promotions. Although Wrestlemania Four was a flop in more ways than one, Randy Savage's title reign proved that the Wrestlemania drought is not inevitable. Second goes to the NWA. They would have won first, but The Bunkhouse Stampede disaster must not be forgotten, and The Baltimore Bash is not part of the first half of the year. The Clash of the Champions was simply a marvelous show when ignoring the last five minutes. They have great matches on a consistent basis. Third goes to Continental who went from a dead regional promotion to the hottest in the country. They are now on cable, and have probably the best booker today in Eddie Gilbert. Fourth goes to World Class for being exciting once again and drawing much better than last year.

MATCH OF THE MID-YEAR

The best match I saw this year was the Midnight Express-Fantastics Clash battle. It was a perfect blend of fabulous brawling, technical wrestling, and smooth teamwork. It wasn't so long that the viewers lost interest, either. Second goes to Flair-Sting which was the best long match I've seen. There were no real slow points in the match that you feel like fast-forwarding through. A close second is the Clash Windham/Luger-Tully/Arn battle which was almost the perfect tag team match. Fourth goes to any of the top DiBiase-Savage matches from MSG.

MANAGER OF THE YEAR

I have to pick Paul E. Dangerously because wherever he goes he is the center of attention. He is great on the mike. The Pro Wrestling This Week angle was a lot of fun. He gets the nod over second place Jim Cornette also because he has a lot to do with the angles that go on in the areas he is in, and probably is all-around a "wrestling genious". Jim Cornette is second and only because what you see on TV is the extent of his work, where Paul E. Dangerously has so much to do with what goes on behind the scenes in the promotions. Third goes to Bobby Heenan, who, if he was in another promotion would not be lost in the crowd of Titan managers. He still is one of the all-time great managers. Fourth goes to Jimmy Hart whose act I still like, but wished it would get more exposure one of these days.

ANNOUNCER OF THE MID-YEAR

Jim Ross is the best. He doesn't talk down to the fans and makes a boring match seem exciting and an exciting match seem like a classic. Lance Russell is second for his professionalism and unique laid-back style. Tony Shiavone gets three for similar reasons as Ross. Fourth goes to Jesse Ventura for his humor and unique style.

FEUD OF THE MID-YEAR

I like Hennig-Lawler first. It single-handedly turned Memphis into a drawing and exciting area once again. Look at Memphis now. The skits were great in the CWA studio and believable. The matches weren't bad either. Second goes to DiBiase-Savage for its good matches and ability to draw. Third goes to Midnight-Fantastics, and fourth to Sting-Flair.

ANGLE/PUSH/GIMMICK OF THE MID-YEAR

I really enjoyed the skit where Hennig destroyed the set in Memphis wanting to get his hands on Lawler, and then threatening Lance Russell when Lawler didn't show his face, and then kicking Lawler in the groin when Jerry finally came out. That gets first. Second goes to the Tom Pritchard-Dirty White Girl incident. Everyone involoved played the skit to perfection including Gordon Solie and DWB. The hanging episode after was great. Third goes to the Roberts-Rude angle mainly due to its success. Fourth goes to the Windham turn.

OTHER CATEGORIES

Most Improved: Lex Luger
Most Deproved: Steve Williams
TV Show: Saturday Night's Main Event
Babyface: Randy Savage (2nd: Sting)
Heel: Curt Hennig (2nd: Ted Dibiase)
Worst Wrestler: George Steele
Worst Promotion: IWA (2nd & 3rd: IWA) ***

IF I WERE BOOKER

We, collectively known as insider fans or "smart" fans, are not shy when it comes to criticizing promotional decisions. "The booker" is the person (or group of persons) who decides what angles occur and which performers get pushes. It is not an easy job, and a lot more goes into decision making than meets the eye. However, there is no doubting that insider fans do have good ideas, and promoters and bookers should at least read and consider our opinions, ideas, and thoughts. The following is a compilation of what the readers of The Torch would do if they were immediately made booker of a chosen league. Some are very serious, and others are obviously not, but in any case, read on and enjoy the following article, "If I Were Booker..."

* *

BOOKER: NELS LOOSER...

If given control of the NWA, the first thing I would do would be to put Dusty Rhodes as a mid-level performer and NOT a champion of any sort. He would have decent matches with the likes of Ivan Koloff and the few fans he still has would be able to see him at the arena cards. My first objective would be to find a lead babyface and go with him. Lex has been out of the spotlight too long and the Bash will still not give him enough credibility for the role. The only obvious choice is Sting.

I would try to put on another good Clash of the Champions somewhere in mid to late September. There would be good match-ups with maybe a US Title Change or Tag Title Change. I wouldn't make every match create an angle, though. I would only create one angle that evening and that would be to get Flair to lose a non-title match-up to someone like Tim Horner or either one of The Fantastics due to outside interference by Sting.

For the next month I would have Flair do interviews saying how HE wants Sting, and for the next month, Sting would refuse and keep interfering and generally bothering Flair. Finally, when Starrcade hype begins, Sting will finally agree to a match with Flair, but only if he would be allowed to dictate the rules of the match. Flair is a little cautious, but says he'll have his answer in a week. The next week on WTBS, Sting would finally get Flair's ire up by coming out with a girl who claims she's been with Flair and starts comparing him to Sting and saying how Sting is so much more of a man. Flair starts screaming and tells Sting to go ahead and get the contract and that he'll sign it. JJ Dillon comes out and tries to stop Ric, but he signs it after getting away from Dillon.

The following week it is announced that Flair will defend against Sting in a No DQ/No Time Limit/Two Referee/Cage Match where the winner must either make his opponent submit or win by pinfall. Things would be very quiet then from these two until Starrcade rolls around. For the rest of Starrcade, I'd have a few other minor angles to build up grudge matches, but would keep the blood down to a minimum.

THE MATCH: Sting would come to the ring first but would be carrying a conspicuous small brown paper bag with him. Flair would then come out to the sound of 2001, wearing his best robe and accompanied by Dillon. Once the introductions are over and Flair and Sting are locked in the cage ready to engage in mortal combat, Sting walks to where the ring announcer is and pulls the microphone into the ring with him. After getting the microphone, he picks up the paper bag and opens it revealing a small caliber handgun. He announces that if he shot Flair and pinned him he'd win anyway, so why doesn't Flair just simply submit the match and title to him. Flair refuses, assuming the gun is a fake, but when Sting shoots a lightbulb from the ceiling, Flair quickly submits. Sting would be my new champion and he would keep the title for a long time, facing all comers and winning most of his matches by pinfall to prove that even though he used underhanded tactics to win the title, he is worthy of it.

Flair would shortly thereafter be kicked out of the Four Horsemen and turn into a face and feud with Windham over the US Belt or he'd team with Lex Luger and take on Tully and Arn for the Tag Title.

I know my idea is a very a hard-core angle, but the way things are running for the NWA right now, they really need something to get people to go WOW and it needs to be pulled off successfully. If not, Titan will just keep pulling further and further ahead of Crockett until Titan has the country monopolized. If I were booker, that's what I'd do.

* *

BOOKER: WADE KELLER...

If I were booker... for the IWA (Intercontinental Wrestling America) based in Minnesota, I would change several things. Right now they are running a point system type tournament to decide who is the first IWA Champion. This idea is useless, and the AWA proved that with the TV Title farce late last year. They could draw a decent crowd if they hyped an IWA Title Tournament. They should take advantage of this. I would have my television taping in the usual place (due to financial reasons), at St. Bridget's School in Minneapolis, MN, or somewhere else cheap with more seats. I would have the one-night tournament here, and tape it. Then for the next two weeks I would show highlights of the matches on both of the half-hour weekly shows, with the final match on the second week. In my tournament I would have all of the usuals. Jim Gagnon, Tom Sichak, Johnny Love, Steve O, Wolf the Terminator, Riggz the Terminator, Buck Zumhoff, The Alaskan, JT Spider, ED Fritz, etc. I would keep the "jobbers" out of the tournament. The first week of TV would show highlights of the first two rounds. The second week would show the two semi-final matches along with the final to decide the champion. In the semi-finals I would have Johnny Love defeat Steve O and Jim Gagnon defeat Riggz in a great brawl. The final would then have Johnny Love, who recently turned heel, versus Jim Gagnon, the lead babyface for the IWA. I would have The Terminators come to ringside. They would act like innocent observers. Love would toss Gagnon over the top rope. The Terminators would then beat on Gagnon. Johnny Love would distract the referee as this is going on. Then the Terminators would toss a bloody Gagnon back in the ring. Johnny Love then would mount the ropes and come off onto Gagnon with a flying crossbody block. The ref would make the three count and Johnny Love would be the IWA Champion. The Terminators would join Johnny Love in the celebration. I would make Johnny Love the center of the promotion. He is the best wrestler they've got, and has a great Terry Taylor-type schtick. Every-other week I would have Johnny Love defend the title on TV. One week they would plug the hell out of it, and the next week they would have a great main event. He could defend against Jim Gagnon, JT Spider, Catfish Charley, Steve O, etc. Having these bi-weekly title defenses will give fans a reason to tune in, and it also will showcase good matches and a great talent, in Johnny Love.

In other feuds I would have The Terminators feud with "The Initial Shock" (J.T. Spider and E.D. Fritz) over the IWA Tag Team Belts, with several title changes occurring between them. This makes the fans think a title change could happen anytime, even in their town. I would also establish a feud between Tom Sichak & Chris Markoff and Buck Zumhoff & Steve O. I would do some little things to add to the promotion. I would keep Buck Zumhoff away from color commentating. Ted Turner hasn't gotten to him yet. I would most importantly keep Jim Koch away from the microphone. He says such ridiculous things, I can't believe it. Jim Koch is called "the commissioner", but he is actually the owner. If you thought John Ayres in the UWF was bad, you haven't heard Jim Koch try to make conversation. Steve O is okay on color, but George Shire really adds to Bob Montana and keeps him from saying "here in the IWA" too much. George Shire should be brought in full-time. I would also push Catfish Charley,

who is now wasted doing jobs. He is much more marketable than Buck Zumhoff or Chris Markoff. One more guy who deserves a push is Mark Wagner (The Outpatient) who I believe they already plan to push. Anyone in Minnesota will tell you that the IWA is far from a good promotion, but with some work they could make it well worth watching.

* *

BOOKER: VICTOR MARTINEZ...

If I were booker, I'd turn Ric Flair babyface immediately. I'd keep Dusty in with a mid-level role, not as a headliner. I'd return The Road Warriors to the headlining destroyers they used to be. I'd make sure The Rock & Roll Express were heels. I'd give Jim Cornette a regular commentating role. Fire The Powers of Pain, Paul Jones, and David Crockett.

In the WWF give Hulk Hogan back the strap, dismantle Strike Force, demote The Honkeytonk Man.

If I were booker of a mythical wrestling promotion, I would bring in more young, fast, high-flying Jr. Heavyweights and good women wrestlers.

* *

BOOKER: LARRY SAALE...

It was the ultimate wrestling card. It was a cold, rainy evening, and the wrestling fans had to wait three hours in the rain, in line to get their seats before the stadium opened up.

The first match was Ric Flair versus Randy Savage for the unification of the NWA and WWF wrestling belts. It only lasted three minutes before the crowd of fans booed the wrestlers out of the squared circle. The fans wanted to see the main match, the cage match!

The music started. It was an old song, but everyone knew it: "He's Got The Whole World In His Hands". Vince McMahon Jr. then came running out to the ring. The crowd was in a panic, trying to find the air-sick bags!

Vince climbed into the ring, pulled off his T-shirt, and stood still for five minutes, waiting for the fans to stop laughing.

Then Jim Crockett came marching down the aisle with his theme song, "Yes, We Have No Bananas!" In the ring Crockett tried to rip off his T-shirt, but couldn't so he decided to leave it on.

With both men in the ring, the match started. The fans were yelling---"WE WANT BLOOD!".

McMahon Jr. quickly put himself into a head lock, and rammed his head into the turnbuckle, then he bladed himself.

Crockett started to bash his own head into the steel cage, trying to draw more blood than Vince. Crockett was mad because he didn't think about the blade gimmick before Vince did. Both men turned around and looked at each other. There was blood everywhere.

Then they noticed for the first time that there wasn't any referee in the ring. A man wearing a mask came running up to the ring. He said that he would referee the match. McMahon Jr. and Crockett didn't know who the masked man was, so they asked if Dave Meltzer was in the building. If anyone knew who the masked man was, it would be Dave Meltzer.

Dave came running up to the ring, after waking up from sleep caused by total boredom. Dave said that he knew who the masked man was, and quickly yanked off the masked man's mask, revealing Wade Keller.

Vince McMahon Jr. and Crockett decided to have a rematch, that way they would make more money.

The fans felt like they were ripped-off, and started yelling some insults! To make the fans happy, a third match was immediately set up between Queen Kong and Adrian Adonis...both to be topless. At this point the fans quickly dropped their air-sick bags and ran to the closest exit. Wow! What a night it was!

For some strange reason the fans stopped watching the NWA and WWF wrestling, and amazingly the AWA wrestling has grown tremendously popular.

* *

BOOKER: THE RANDOM MARK...

1)Ric Flair turns and takes The Four Horsemen name with him.

2)Dusty Rhodes turns and forms The Dream Team.

3)It is Flair, Luger, Sting, and various guest faces versus Dusty, Windham, Dr. Death and various guest heels.

4)Hawk turns on Animal and there is your feud of the year.

5)I hire Paul E., Eddie, and Terry Taylor and tell them, "Put something together. You have a free hand with middle of the card booking."

6)I hire Owen Hart to "face off" against Paul E., etc.

7)I hire retired Japanese ladies starting with Dump.

8)My new lead tag team is Arn Anderson and Curt Hennig.

My big Pay TV event is the public execution of The American Dream, Dusty Rhodes. He is placed in a sealed cage with four rabid badgers. If he survives that, he is drowned in a vat of Mello Yello. If he survives that, he is rolled into the ring for five minutes with Dump Matsumoto. He cannot survive that. On the undercard, number one face, Flair and third heel, Dr, Death turn in the match of the year. Barry Windham moves up to the lead heel and his second spot was taken by Mr. Fuji. Playboy Buddy Rose, at 350 pounds, is brought in to do the entire Ravishing Rick Rude act. Instead of the "Rude Awakening", he gives them the "Rose Tattoo".

Now for the second week...

* *

BOOKER: ELYSE ZOIS...

If I were booker for the NWA I'd:

-Hire the Hebner Twins to referee all title matches

-Have Ric Flair proclaim himself The Emperor of Wrestling.

-Form the Koloffs into a tag team called the Leninites.

-Have Jim Cornette grow his hair long and trade his tennis racket for a megaphone.

-Ban Tommy Young from refereeing and make him an associate member of The Four Horsemen.

-Give Steve Williams a two-by-four and teach him to yell "Ho-o-o-o".

-Make the Sheepherders carry American flags and tell how much they love this country. They can get all of our holidays mixed up.

-Find an announcer who can yell hysterically, "We've got a new champion!" at every two count.

-Get The Fantastics a dog to take to ringside.

-Have JJ Dillon kidnap the dog.

-Get the Russian Assassin a warden's outfit and have him handcuff his opponents after the match.

-Tell Lex Luger to wear a t-shirt with his name on it.

-Turn Dusty Rhodes into a preacher and have him spread the message of love.

-Have Kevin Sullivan become wealthy and try to buy the NWA Title.

-Get Jimmy sunglasses and a bandana, and teach Precious how to simper.

-Tell Ronnie Garvin to act like he doesn't know who Jimmy is.

-(Wade's Addition) Have Ron Garvin change his last name and become a jobber. Also have him read a poem off of his towel before every match and throw it to the crowd... Sorry!?.

-Have Arn Anderson turn good and start giving haircuts after the match.

-Instruct Tony Shiavone to forget everything that happened prior to 1984.

-Get the Road Warriors a pseudo-Japanese manager.

-Find another audience. The present NWA fans would never go for this.

* *

BOOKER: BETSY ANDERSON...

It is Thanksgiving Eve, 1988, and the big

NWA has a disastrous Starrcade. The major stars refuse to work because they haven't been paid. They all jump to the WWF except for The Road Warriors. The Roadies change their act. Vince won't have them unless they do change, since Demolition is still there.

Hulk Hogan retires at Christmas to become a Wide World of Sports commentator. He is quickly fired and becomes a frequent guest on talk shows.

Ted DiBiase is the WWF Heavyweight Champion, and Randy Savage has gone back to being Intercontinental Champ. Rick Martel and Bret Hart, The Heartthrobs, are tag-team champions.

Flair comes to the WWF as a face and has a brutal series with DiBiase. FLair wins the title on January pay-per-view.

Barry Windham enters the WWF as a heel and has a series with Savage. Windham wins the belt on February's Saturday Night's Main Event.

At this point, Ted DiBiase forms a tag team with Terry Taylor, The Class Act. Flair is corrupted by DiBiase's money, and turns on Dusty during a tag team event. Flair, WIndham, DiBiase, and Taylor form the new Four Horsemen.

In response, Dusty, Andre the Giant, and Blackjack Mulligan form the Three Musketeers. Smart fans the world over affectionately refer to them as the Triple Coronary Bypass. Hulk Hogan threatens to come out of retirement to rid the WWF of The Four Horsemen.

Vince McMahon decides that he needs a strong face team to feud with The Class Act. The Roadies are unhappy and broke, and agree to come in as The Dynamic Duo, complete with capes and masks.

It is now Wrestlemania Five. The main event is a loser retires match between Flair and Hogan. Windham versus Rhodes and Class Act versus Dynamic Duo on the undercard.

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BOOKER: ANDY KING...

If I were booker for the World Wrestling Federation, I would make a lot of changes there. First, the disqualification rule would go into effect for all title matches. It has always been my opinion that if a champion must stoop so low as to get himself disqualified simply for the purpose of saving his title, he does not deserve to have the title. All managers would be banned from ringside, eliminating all outside interference. Even though the few babyface managers there are do not interfere, banning all managers would eliminate controversy and evidence of favoritism.

I would try to bring in more new talent, but not as often. I would also change the TV programs so the different wrestlers got their share of the spotlight. The same wrestlers are seen over and over lately, and others are being ignored. The WWF has an enormous talent roster, but the way they exhibit their talent, one would never know it. The quality of TV matches would be improved so that they would not only be worth watching, but the outcome would not always be so predictable. Big name stars would go against each other, and some jobbers would face each other. Some examples might see Scott Casey take on Tom Stone and Rick Rude versus Jake Roberts. Some of the more popular jobbers (such as Brady Boone) would get pushes. Boone has the potential to be a star, but he is not getting the type of publicity he needs to prove it. Gimmicks such as the dogs, birds, etc. would be kept to a minimum. I would hire some new commentators that knew what they were talking about. When a wrestler enters the area, his previous career would be discussed to some extent so fans who may not know about this individual could learn something about him. When a major personality was injured or left the area, the truth about what happened would become common knowledge, highly unlike the BS that is currently floating around today. These announcers would not make the matches sound so obviously fixed. Anybody who understands how a WWF TV taping works knows three or four weeks worth of shows are taped at the same place on one night. For example, on the February 6 show, Jesse Ventura wanted to talk about the Hogan-Andre match on February 5. He was censored not because of a so-called order from Jack Tunney, but because the show was taped a whole week in advance. The only way Jesse could have talked was to come right out and admit the outcomes were fixed. Another thing they do is they show matches that are a few months old but they dub in commentary that makes the match seen to have occurred within the last few days (or weeks). If I were a booker, things like this would become a thing of the past.

These are only some of the things I would do if I were booker for the WWF. I'm sure there are some others who would agree with me, and I hope that if Vince McMahon and/or Jack Tunney are ever replaced, their successor will put use to ideas like these.

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JASON POWELL...

In the AWA, the first thing I would do is dump Jerry Lawler as AWA Champion. "The King" hasn't proved he can draw in the midwest yet. I'd give him two months, or two shows, in each of the midwest cities that the AWA tours. And if he draws poorly, get the axe! Now I know Jarrett Promotions pays Curt Hennig's contract in return for them using Lawler as champ, but with the AWA planning a lot of major events for the summer, I have to wonder if Lawler would draw people to the events. Curt Hennig or Kerry Von Erich meet for one World Champion. Be serious, what would you rather see, Jerry Lawler versus Kerry, or Curt Hennig versus Kerry?

The tag team titles would definitely stay with Badd Company. These guys are a one in a million tag team. The top challengers would be Ricky Rice and John Paul DeMann. I definitely try to recruit either Hector or Chavo Guerrero to come in and team with Brother Mando, and push them against Badd Company.

The TV Title would not stay with Greg Gagne very long. They say he's the only person they can count on being there in a week. How about Soldat Ustinov? I doubt he's leaving soon. He's a better than average worker, and definitely more believable than Gagne. The top challengers for his title would be Derrick Dukes, Wahoo McDaniel, and possibly Cousin Luke.

Speaking of Dukes, he would definitely get a huge push. He's great, the crowd was into him, and he's a super guy. I don't mean to accuse anyone, but I've heard from one person that Verne won't push Derrick because he's black. If that's true, it is really pathetic. No real wrestling fan cares if a wrestler is black, white, or green. Derrick deserves a push, and would get one if I was booking. Another wrestler who I would go all out for is Larry "The Butcher" Cameron. As Jon Gallagher says, "Larry is the only guy I know who can walk into an arena where nobody knows him, and have the crowd hating him in five minutes." This guy could be the number-one heel in any area he chooses to go.

Other wrestlers I would try to bring in the area are Johnny Love, Tom Zenk, Jeff Jarrett, The Cheetah Kid, Kendall Windham, and "Cactus" Jack Foley.

The IWA is one of the most backward areas in the world. One day they're the PWA and have the top independent wrestlers coming in all of the time. Then Jim Koch takes over and dumps Eddie Sharkey and all of the people who were in his camp. He then makes a complete fool out of himself by hiring Jim Mitchell to take over Sharkey's promotion. Of course I would try to bring back Sharkey and his group and "can" Mitchell. But the following is what I would do without Sharkey's group.

The champion would be "Big" Jim Gagnon. Gagnon is the only person left in the area who seems "over". The number-one challenger would be Mike St. James (heel). Both wrestlers are about 6'6" and both are faces doing the same thing. If St. James didn't make it as a heel, The Wild Alaskan would be the number-one heel. He has proven to be a fair heel, and matches up in size with Gagnon. That's the only reason Johnny Love wouldn't be number-one heel. He doesn't match up in size with Gagnon.

The tag team title would stay with The

Terminators. Riggz and Wolf are the only known team in the area. The top challengers would be JT the Spider and Catfish Charlie.

Getting pushes would be Catfish Charley and Red Tyler. Getting de-pushed would be ED Fritz. Let's face it, the guy is boring.

Turning heel would be Mike St. James and Steve O. Steve O is constantly getting booed, and the fans around ringside have always chanted "Steve O sucks".

I would add a TV Title that would be defended every week on TV. The first champ would be Johnny Love, who is really getting "negative heat". His top challenger would be Buck Zumhoff, who seems to be over, and matches up in size with Love.

I really think the NWA made a mistake when they didn't give Lex Luger the belt at the Bash card on July 10th. Flair seems to be getting old, and could use a change. Luger would be my champion. Windham would beat Luger soon, and Ric Flair would turn face and battle Windham at Starrcade 88.

The tag team titles would go to Steve Williams and Nikita Koloff. Then in about a month, Koloff would turn on Williams to set up a major feud. Taking over the tag team titles would then be given back to Arn Anderson and Tully Blanchard. Their top challengers would be The Road Warriors who would eventually win the belts.

The US Title would belong to Sting, who would beat Windham long before Starrcade. His number-one contender would be Mike Rotunda, who by the way would drop the TV Title even before July 10 to face Ron Garvin. Garvin, who is now a heel, would defend his strap against Dusty Rhodes and brother Jimmy Garvin.

The US Tag Team Title would never have gone back to The Midnight Express. The Fantastics would defend the titles against The Rock & Roll Express in a face versus face match and Morton and Gibson would have turned heel and stolen the belts.

The World Six-Man Titles would go either to Kevin Sullivan and The Varsity Club or Larry Zbyszko, Al Perez, and Nikita Koloff or Ron Garvin. The top contenders would be The Road Warriors with Dusty Rhodes, Lex Luger, or Steve Williams.

The Western States and Florida belts would either be eliminated, or merged into one. The champion would be Jimmy Garvin who would feud with Ronnie Garvin or Kevin Sullivan and his Varsity Club.

In the WWF, the World Title would stay with Savage. His number-one contenders would be Terry Taylor (who would some day take the belt, Ted DiBiase, Andre the Giant, and a heel Bam Bam Bigelow.

The tag titles would change hands, as The Powers of Pain would win the titles and defend the belts against Demolition, and The Bolsheviks until a good heel team could be brought into the area. If I knew that no heel teams were available outside the WWF, then The Rockers would take the belts. Their number-one contenders would be The Fabulous Rougeaus and The Hart Foundation would stay heel.

The Intercontinental Title would go to either Jake Roberts or Brutis Beefcake. This would happen very soon. Top heel contenders would be Terry Taylor, Rick Rude, and Greg Valentine.

If I could I would try to bring back Tom Zenk and team him with Terry Taylor as the TnT's. They could be used either as heels or babyfaces.

To go up against the Crockett Cup, I'd have my own tag team tournament. The first round would have Demolition-TnT's, Rougeaus-British Bulldogs, Rockers-Bolsheviks, and Powers-Harts. Eventually the final would feature The Rockers-TnT's. For some reason The Rockers would put the tag team titles on the line, and the TnT's would turn heels and win the belts.

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BOOKER: DAVID J. McCORMICK...

If I were a booker, more specifically Dusty Dream Whip, I would revolve the long awaited turn of Ric Flair around the recent turn of Barry Windham.

Perhaps have Barry destroy every face he meets, causing jealousy among the Horsemen. Windham gets a swelled head and becomes so obnoxious that The Horsemen camp is riled and the Flair-Windham classic matches of old are revived, this time with the roles reversed. The other Horsemen say they want to see the classic battles and vow not to interfere in the matches, until Blackjack Mulligan is brought in to ambush Flair and he and Barry tear him to shreds. The Horsemen join the fray for the next matches and Dusty and Dick Murdoch join Barry to even sides. It ends up a best of seven series lumberjack style!! Who wins is not important, as the real winners will be the fans that attend the matches!

* *

BOOKER: STEVE GENTRY...

If I were booker of the NWA I would be about 150 pounds overweight, have disgustingly thick scar tissue, and have a huge ego. Luckily, I'm only pretending to be.

The first thing I'd do would be to break up The Four Horsemen. FLair would become the lead babyface and Tully and Arn would be knocked down to the middle of the card with manager JJ Dillon. The Road Warriors would take over the World Tag Team Titles, returning to their aggressive style with the fans still on their side. The Varsity Club would take the role of lead heels with the addition of Steve "Dr. Death" Williams, Ron Simmons, and "Coach" (Downtown) Bruno replacing Kevin Sullivan as manager. Sting and Luger would also headline as top babyfaces. The Midnight Express and Jim Cornette would be turned babyface after a violent attack by The Sheepherders. Chris Champion would reform the New Breed with a young, exciting star such as Brian Pillman or somebody. In an eight man tag match pitting The Midnight Express and The New Breed against The Varsity Club, The Midnights will attack the New Breed, setting up another hot feud for the Midnights, with real talent on top and bums like Dusty and Nikita stuck on the bottom of the cards, the crowds increase with every show. Soon Vince McMadmahon is biting the dust and wrestling is better than ever before. ***

THE BEST OF THE QUOTEBOOK
Featuring Paul E. Dangerously

"I now introduce to you, the only pair in Las Vegas that can beat a full house, The Midnight Express."

(Imitating Tommy Rich): "Mama, they made me look just like Tammy Baker. They put lipstick all over my face."

(On the AWA): "You've fined me. You've suspended me. And you've banned my Danger Zone. You've done everything you can."

Somebody from Somewhere: "Tell a man there are 300 billion stars in the universe and he'll believe you. Tell him a bench has wet paint and he'll have to touch it to be sure."

(On the AWA): "You want these belts so much, tell you what, you can have them. AWA, you won't have Paul E. Dangerously and The Midnight Express to kick around no more."

Someone from Somewhere: "A meeting is a place where minutes are kept and hours are lost."

(On the AWA): "You oughta' put your headquarters in Disneyland because as far as I'm concerned your whole promotion is Mickey Mouse."

Someone from Somewhere: "When all is said and done, a hell of a lot more is said than done."

(To Joe Pedicino): "I guess you think it's the greatest thing since Dominoes said you could get double cheese on their pizzas."

Someone from Somewhere: "An expert is one who knows more and more, about less and less, until he knows absolutely everything about nothing."

"Gordon Solie is still calling me every week saying, 'Please, Paul E., please let me back on Pro Wrestling This Week.'"

(To JT Southern): Come on, hippie!"

"For once in my life I have nothing to say."

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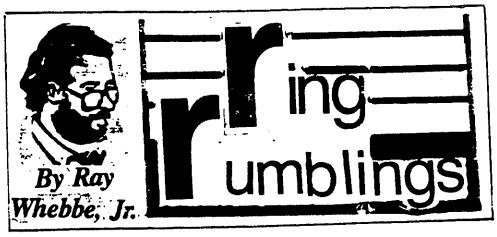

RAY WHEBBE'S RING RUMBLINGS ANNUAL

Working with The Torch has not always been fun, but the efforts are always worth it. In a month's period of time I write as many as twenty articles for other publications, host four sports talk TV shows, promote one or two wrestling cards, head a coalition for the homeless, sit on the board of a church youth group, and work a 40+ hour week at a shelter for the homeless. To say I'm busy is an understatement. Writing for The Torch pays nothing. Writing for sports in The Cities pays well. Yet I enjoy what The Torch does as much as anything else I do.

The Torch is a unique newsletter. Wade Keller writes to the most informed fan yet continues to look at wrestling with childlike faith and mark-like inspiration. Wade is all of seventeen years old. Forget the age and he's one helluva writer. Yet what may be his finest trait is his age. Because he is young, Wade is not bitter about wrestling, life, or his future.

Often I moan about my problems to Wade. I'll whine about the IWA, the demise of the PWA, not having enough money, my wife being slightly crabby, the Twins, my diet, my job and last but not least the state of pro wrestling.

Wade will patiently listen to these problems and return to me optimism, insight and strength. At seventeen the lad has no crosses to bear, axes to grind, or chips on his shoulder. For this I am grateful and hope and pray he never loses this outlook.

The Torch is representative of Wade's lifestyle. It's generally fun, informative, witty, and insightful. My only regret is that it is not read by a widespread audience. Such works of love often fade into oblivion due to a lack of profits. Hopefully The Torch will never succumb to that possibility.

Brad Breitzman is an equally powerful face in The Torch. Although he may appear in less by-lines than Wade or myself, he continues to give us great ideas and constructive criticism. Like Wade, he has a childlike faith. However, as a college guy he's got a bit more of my skepticism. Behind all this Brad is a world class guy, a damn decent wrestling fan, and probably a lot better man and writer than he realizes.

The "kafabe sheet" market seems at present to be flooded. There will always be a market for Dave Meltzer's informative but crotchety Observer. The Forum serves a purpose too. What The Torch can do and does effectively is give the reader the best of both worlds. The Torch is informative, insightful, and looks at wrestling through eyes of glee. Shouldn't we all?

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WHY ABDUALLAH THE BUTCHER DESERVES MORE RESPECT

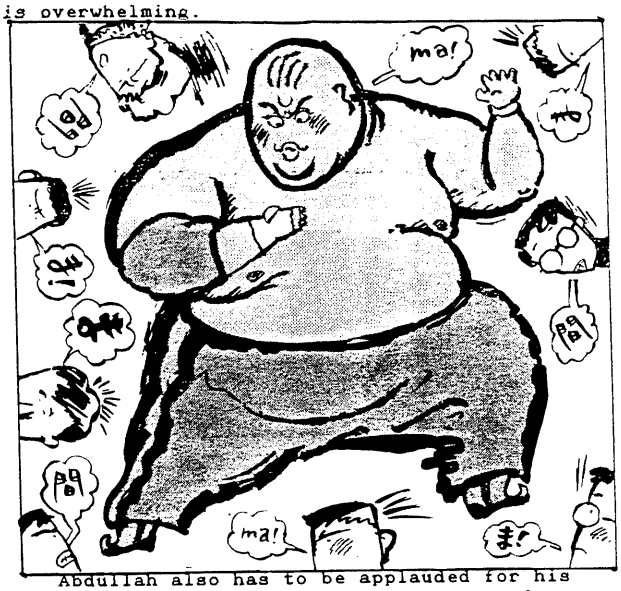
Over the years I've never heard opinions range so much as they do over Abdullah the Butcher. Some say he's a grotesque, useless, bloody pig. Yet others love his persona. In my opinion Abdullah the Butcher deserves serious recognition as one of today's top wrestlers.

Wrestling has often been compared to a soap opera. It also has all the elements of a great horror or fantasy film. Accepting the fact wrestling is sports entertainment, it must follow a storyline. Like horror films, we want it to be dramatic, tense, thrilling, competitive and violent. However if it's too hokey or too real, problems will arise at the box office.

Virtually every promotion uses a horror type star at one time or another. Jason the Terrible, Big Van Vader, Bam Bam Bigelow, Stan Hansen, The Road Warriors, Bruiser Brody and even Hulk Hogan and Randy Savage have used that persona to benefit their careers. Yet filling this role can be difficult. Not everyone can be believably scary.

The best horror figure of all time is Abdullah the Butcher. He is violent scary and unpredictable. Add totally awesome to that if you've seen Abdullah's 1987 Real World Cup appearances. In Japan the man's timing and aura is unbelievable. The crowds are in awe of his every perfectly timed move as they sit at the edge of the chairs oohing and aahing.

Consistency and crowd reaction are two other gauges we use to hate a wrestler. Ability is often considered but can hurt a man unless he uses it. I'd rather see a limited overachiever than a talented underachiever anyday. Abdullah definitely fits into the category of doing the most with what he has. In doing so his performances are consistent and crowd reaction is overwhelming.



Abdullah also has to be applauded for his ability to stay active as an independent in these trying times. Though he is capable of earning megabucks in Puerto Rico or Japan, the man is always willing to work with the "little guys".

Many can throw dropkicks, many can do suplexes and, many can put on 45 minute matches but there's only one Abdullah the Butcher.

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PUERTO RICO BOYCOTT IS IN ORDER

The loss of Bruiser Brody will hurt the independents tremendously. For starters a boycott of Puerto Rico's Capital Sports is in order. Thus it gives independents one less place to work. Brody also kept working for independent groups like the PWA, NWF, South Illinois Wrestling, Windy City Wrestling, and anyone who'd ask. When Brody was in town, money was made.

Brody also opened countless doors for other workers. He kept Abdullah, Nord, and The Fantastics busy in slow times. In Japan he made it possible for an aging Jimmy Snuka return.

Invader #1 was allowed to wrestle after he allegedly murdered Brody. Because of this the promotion appears to have backed The Invader. All considered, a Puerto Rican boycott is in order.

The boycott should be recognized by all Americans and all Japan stars. Thus it must be aided by the NWA, AWA, and WWF. These promotions owe it to the Americans who tour with Capital Sports jobs in the U.S. Danny Spivey, The Funks, Bobby Jaggers and Phil La Fleur could be used effectively in the AWA. The Funks for sure as they don't want to work daily.

The WWF owes The Youngbloods a shot. They have a flashy image, are fiery and would fit into the WWF's scheme of things well. They are also American bred minorities who really should be given an opportunity to work in the home country. If they can't, wrestling in the States deserves to be boycotted as well. It's a sorry state of affairs when "phoney Russians" can work in wrestling but minorities cannot.

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IS IT TIME TO CHANGE WRESTLING JARGON?

I truly hate the word "smart" fans. It assumes others are dumb. After all who's the dummy. The so-called "marks" have fun at matches and so-called "smarts" are crabby....1987-88 saw small movements toward minority hirings. The WWF took on Bad News Brown (but degradingly casts the Olympic hero as a thug) and the AWA hired the high flying Derrick Dukes and Manny Fernandez. If changes aren't made soon it would be nice to see Jesse Jackson's PUSH stir things up.

MELTZER'S MID-YEAR PICKS

The following feature was written by Dave Meltzer. He is the editor of The Wrestling Observer Newsletter, the most widely read insider wrestling newsletter today, and for good reason. You can get The Wrestling Observer Newsletter by sending $5.00 for four weekly issues to Dave Meltzer; PO Box 1228; Campbell, CA 95009-1228. Dave has revealed who he feels are the leading candidates for his year-end awards. I thank Dave for his contribution...

MELTZER MID-YEAR PICKS

With 1988 half over, here are some of my thoughts on the favorites for the 1988 year-end awards:

WRESTLER OF THE YEAR: This is a tough one because it encompasses so many different things, and especially so this year because nobody really is a standout for the award. If we look at pure impact, the top guys would be Hulk Hogan, Akira Maeda and Randy Savage. However, I really can't consider Hogan for first place because it would totally negate ability and work-rate as a criteria. In addition, he hasn't even wrestled for three of the past six months, and what he did in the first three months would only be called wrestling by the most broad definition. So I can't even consider him for the top three this time out, even though I picked him third last year. You can't have much more impact on a business than Maeda, who like Riki Choshu last year, single-handedly changed the power structure of wrestling in Japan. His UWF is on fire and selling out cards in 15 minutes is a testament to his popularity. He's easily the most over wrestler in Japan. But I can't consider him for a top three spot either. First off, he's only wrestled twice this year, and even though he was a top five wrestler last year, he's shown none of that form this year. Inactivity takes him out, plus the quality of his work eliminates him, no matter what he has done in the past. Savage is another story. With Hogan out of the picture these past three months, he's the hottest wrestler in the U.S. He's also a good worker, and often great worker, although his consistency level keeps me from considering him a top 10 wrestler. Ted DiBiase isn't as hot as Savage, but he's still the second hottest wrestler in the U.S. and probably the best worker in this country, save perhaps Ric Flair. He's had impact, was part of all the key skits in the UWF, and has pretty consistently had good matches with foes which with the exception of Savage himself, haven't been too good. Because of that I'll pick him first for now. My second place pick is Owen Hart. He's simply the best performer in the business right now and his consistency is something nobody in the game has approached since the Ric Flair of 1986. While he's not a major impact player because he's not with the major circuits here, his impact in getting Stampede wrestling more respect and exposure can't be denied. He's pretty well made the circuit in the newsletters and magazines, not only here, but in Japan as well. He's held major titles in both Canada and Japan, and being a star in different worlds is something no other candidate can boast of. In third I'll pick Savage, because he has both major impact and he's also a top-notch wrestler, and holds the most well-known title in the game to boot. Many people will wonder about perennial pick Ric Flair. In my mind, Flair has done nothing to make him a candidate for this award. His impact is small. His drawing power is nothing special. Sure, his matches are as good as anyone's and better than all but one or two wrestlers, but it's the same old story nowadays with nothing new. Actually the top three are very close and virtually interchangeable in my mind, and any of the three could easily be No. 1 by the end of the year.

MOST OUTSTANDING WRESTLER: Owen Hart is the easy pick for first place this year, simply because nobody else qualifies as putting on a dazzling show night-after-night. In second place I'm going with a surprise, Keiichi Yamada. I have yet to see him in anything less than a very good match this year, his moves are outstanding, and you have to respect a guy who is way too small to be in the business able to make it as big as he has. Third place is between Ric Flair and Ted DiBiase and it's a hard pick. DiBiase has certainly been the better of the two of late, but that's because he's wrestled nobody but Randy Savage every night. The only reason Flair gets the slight nod is because of his Clash of the Champions match with Sting. Simply put, DiBiase couldn't have carried Sting to a match of that level.

BEST BABYFACE: Sabbatical or not, Hulk Hogan has to be first. He's so far above everyone else that any comparison is ridiculous. Chigusa Nagayo gets my second pick once again. If you see her live, you'd pick her first and the only reason I didn't is simply because Hogan puts more people in the stands, even if Chigusa puts more people in front of their television sets. Randy Savage's drawing power as champion has been a pleasant surprise, so he's solidly in third place. The NWA's best candidate here, Sting, had the chance to break into the top three after the first Clash of the Champions, but booker Dusty did such a good job of putting him back into the pack as just another of the boys that I really can't even consider him now.

BEST HEEL: DiBiase sells tickets and nobody plays their role better. He's the consummate pro at being a heel right now and is clearly the class of this field. I never thought Rick Rude would be a candidate for best anything, except abdominals, however the angle with Jake Roberts' wife was one of the highlight angles of the year and has established Rude as the most hated wrestler in the business by the marks. While Rude exudes arrogance tremendously, I think it's more of the right angle for the right person at the right time, simply timing, rather than talent, however you can't deny that fans truly hate his guts. Third goes to Eddie Gilbert, who is a lot more talented than Rude, but not in the same spotlight. Still, he made Memphis wrestling earlier this year, and has turned the Continental area around. He's proven to be the most valuable small circuit wrestler in the country this year. Barry Windham has been pretty good for the NWA and would be my fourth pick, although the rest of the Horsemen are too stale to be considered, and besides that, they are too popular as well. I suppose Andre the Giant should be a top candidate here as well, although nobody else seems to come readily to mind. If Dump Matsumoto hadn't retired, she'd still be No. 1.

FEUD OF THE YEAR: Let's first look at some of the top ones. Fantastics vs. Midnight Express, purely for the quality of their matches, would be the first pick. But it's not even the main feud on its circuit, in fact not even one of the three or four main feuds, so I can't see it in first place. Randy Savage vs. Ted DiBiase has provided good-to-great matches and has drawn surprisingly well and has been promoted pretty good. I can't think of anything else to pick for first place. Jerry Lawler vs. Eddie Gilbert in Memphis was very good. Tom Prichard vs. Tony Anthony in Continental hasn't gotten publicity but it was a good one, but not one of the top three if you consider the box office as Continental wasn't selling any tickets while they were on top. Actually the Von Erichs vs. Freebirds earlier in the year in Dallas was okay, if not five years stale. Owen Hart vs. Makhan Sing is alright, drew fairly good and had mainly great matches. With the exception of Fantastics vs. Midnight, every feud in the NWA has put me to sleep. Andre vs. Duggan and Bobby Heenan vs. Matilda are examples of the worst feuds of the century, and Honkeytonk Man vs. Beefcake wouldn't have a good match in their dreams. Over in Japan, most of the good ones have been outside the ring. Jumbo Tsuruta vs. Genichiro Tenryu has been very good, but they haven't met this year in a singles match yet. Hiroshi Hase vs. Keiichi Yamada is more a rivalry than a feud, although the matches are outstanding. First pick goes to Savage vs. DiBiase, second to Lawler vs. Gilbert and third to Midnight vs. Fantastics.

TAG TEAM OF THE YEAR: There are four candidates who are all virtually interchangeable in positions one through four. The work of the Fantastics has been one of the few bright spots of a generally dull NWA this year, but one can't ignore two other NWA teams, Tully Blanchard & Arn Anderson and the Midnight Express, who have dominated this award the past few years. The other candidate is the underrated Foot Loose (Samson Fuyuki & Toshiaki Kawada) from Japan. Having seen all these teams on a regular basis I can say that I can't pick any above the other right now. I'd pick Midnight Express for first if I had to pick one of them, simply because they are the incumbent team. With the possible exception of Genichiro Tenryu & Ashura Hara, there aren't any tag teams this year who are even in the league with these four.

MOST IMPROVED: This is hard to pick at this point in the year because it generally takes a year before improvements are pronounced enough for one to take real notice of them. Still, Samson Fuyuki, up until the last few months of 1987 was a below-average, overweight wrestler with no future at all. Somehow he's turned into a slim, well-conditioned guy who may be the hardest worker in Japan and is one of the top wrestlers in all of All-Japan. It has been nothing short of a remarkable transformation. Second definitely goes to John Tenta, who as a rookie reminded me of another of these guys with lots of size and credentials but no fire nor aptitude for making it big in pro wrestling. He's made that analysis false as he's turned into probably the second best "big man" in the game today. Masaharu Funaki continues to improve as well.

MOST UNIMPROVED: Riki Choshu has had a terrible year, from his comeback match with Antonio Inoki nearly destroying the promotion in late December, to Inoki's clean win in early February. His status as the hottest wrestler in Japan was totally destroyed, and it shows in his conditioning and enthusiasm as well. He's still not a bad wrestler, but isn't nearly what he once was. When I watch Southern Championship Wrestling, both Tommy Rich and Dick Slater always seem to disappoint me compared to their reputations of past performances. Jim Duggan is terrible now, but he wasn't so hot last year, either. If Akira Maeda has a few more matches like the one he had with Kazuo Yamazaki in May, he'll be right on the list as well.

BEST ON INTERVIEWS: Based on what I've seen, Jim Cornette has to win. He's totally over exposed with all those interviews the NWA guys have to do and the fact they all have to talk about Dusty. Still, Cornette always makes it worth while to pay attention. Michael Hayes has done some of the best individual interviews around, although he's nowhere near as creative as Cornette nor as consistent, but I'll give him second place. Third place is a tough one because there are a lot of good candidates. The interviews Jerry Lawler did after winning the AWA title almost give him the spot; Ric Flair would have the spot if he wouldn't waste his time talking about every other NWA wrestler; and Randy Savage might get the spot except all of what he says is B.S., so I'll go with Paul E. Dangerously third.

BEST FLYING WRESTLER: There are times I wonder whether or not Lucha Libre counts as wrestling, but the best flier I've seen this year is Atlantis. There is nobody who even comes close to some of the things I've seen this guy do. However, most of what he does between the flying moves leaves a lot to be desired. Owen Hart might be more a flying wrestler rather than strictly a flier. In third place I'll go with Keiichi Yamada with Brian Pillman and Toshiaki Kawada and Tiger Mask all battling for fourth.

MOST OVERRATED: There is no shortage of candidates here. My picks here are of wrestlers who are pushed more than they should be rather than wrestlers who are overrated because people think of them as great wrestlers, which they aren't. Hulk Hogan fits into the latter, as does Antonio Inoki. Giant Baba isn't pushed so I can't consider him. Everything that needs to be said about Dusty Rhodes has been said so many times it isn't worth repeating here, but he's easily the top pick here. Second goes to Nikita Koloff. The logic behind pushing him in this day and age is something nobody has ever had an explanation for. I'm going to pick Kevin Von Erich third, and in reality he should be ahead of both Dusty and Nikita, but since World Class has so little talent, his push ahead of, say, Steve Simpson, isn't nearly as tragic as Nikita being pushed and leaving behind guys like Sting, Brad Armstrong, The Fantastics, etc. Honkeytonk Man has no ability, but at least gets heat, although anyone pushed as hard as he has been should be able to get heat. On the other hand, Brutus Beefcake's push is simply because Vince McMahon likes the guy, although the gimmick is over. Probably the most over pushed guy Titan has right now would be Dino Bravo or Don Muraco, simply because of Vince's fascination with muscleheads. Ultimate Warrior has no ability at all, but at least is marketable. Hiroshi Wajima is terrible, but they aren't pushing him like they used to.

MOST UNDERRATED: Once again, I'm not picking a guy who is a great worker but doesn't get pushed, but more guys who could effectively be pushed more than they currently are. Biff Wellington in Calgary fits into the former category, but his size and weakness on interviews wouldn't allow him to be pushed into the main events, even though he's got good ability. Nobuhiko Takada was held back terribly by Inoki before jumping to the UWF, but I guess we've since found out why, since it would have been dumb for them to push him as hard as he deserved and then for he and Kazuo Yamazaki (also underrated) to jump. On Baba's side, The Foot Loose both should be pushed a lot harder, as can Tiger Mask and Shinichi Nakano. They should get the junior heavyweight title off Masa Fuchi and feud these guys over the belt and have the belt mean something like it did when Baba had Tiger Mask feuding with Kuniaki Kobayashi in 1985. Steve DiSalvo can't work a lick, but he'd be a big star in either the NWA or WWF because of his size and interview ability if he would just quit potatoing everyone. In the NWA, Brad Armstrong strikes me as someone who could have been treated better, unlike Tim Horner whose lack of color limits him. Billy Travis is similar to Horner, except in Memphis with less talent, he probably could have been given more of a chance to shine. My picks are Tiger Mask first, Toshiaki Kawada second and Armstrong third.

BEST PROMOTION: Nobody really deserves first place this year. My instincts tell me to pick the WWF, but has anyone ever seen a great WWF card? If they have, please send me a tape because I've been watching for years and calling the best WWF card I've seen "good" would be stretching good quite a bit. Sure, they have the best organization and I marvel at their TV show (I usually turn it off within 10 minutes after I'm done marveling at it, though). The talent is marketed so well it's almost sad and some of the guys can work, but few do when you pay your ticket money. I'm sorry, but I pay to see wrestling, not to watch steroid freaks blow up and hear fans get off by chanting "boring" four matches out of seven, and if I'm lucky, get one three-star match every third card. The NWA has better wrestling but in every other facet they don't qualify, even if Clash of the Champions was the single best national TV card of the past decade. All Japan is well-run, but the matches really aren't that good. New Japan isn't well-run, but the matches are great. The Japanese women are well-run, the matches are great, the heat is like nothing you've ever seen before, and the singing is even good, but they are losing their top stars left and right. I guess I'll pick Japanese women first, New Japan second and Stampede Wrestling third. Continental may be a candidate later in the year. And maybe by the end of the year I'll pick the WWF first, since they are the best promotion, but they are close to the bottom if the category is best wrestling promotion.

BEST TV SHOW: Even though I don't watch the WWF straight through without losing interest, their TV product has surpassed the Japanese.

The angles are crisp and usually well-done. They have no visible technical problems. Their characters are put over well. Actually, the wrestling itself on TV isn't that bad since the UWF guys usually work when cameras are around--at least the 10 percent who really can work. Second I'll go with New Japan, simply because they still have the best matches around. Third is close--Continental has been entertaining of late, but was terrible early in the year. Perhaps by the end of the year I'll consider them a candidate. Memphis is usually good if you overlook the matches and concentrate on watching interviews and fast-forwarding through the rest of the show. Stampede is similar, if you fast-forward past the steroid freaks in prelims and watch three excellent 20 minute-long main events and don't listen to Ed Whalen's inane comments. The one show nobody talks about that I've enjoyed is Ron Fuller's USA show. Still, for the present, I'll pick the Japanese women show third. You can't beat the wrestling and you can't even complain about the singing.

MATCH OF THE YEAR: Let's check out the candidates: Keep in mind that as I write this, I haven't seen three matches which I've been told are solid candidates--Owen Hart vs. Hiro Hase IWGP Jr. Title change; Hart vs. Keiichi Yamada Jr. Title match from Hiroshima and Tenryu & Hara losing the PWF tag title to Tsuruta & Yatsu in Sapporo, so those aren't considered here. There have been no super standout classic matches like the Flair vs. Windham matches in Orlando (1986) and Fayetteville (1987) or say the Tiger Mask vs. Dynamite Kid level classics or Choshu & Yatsu vs. Tsuruta & Tenryu or New Leaders vs. Now Leaders. No five stars this year. Jan. 2 in Tokyo had Tenryu & Hara vs. Tsuruta & Yatsu--very good match for sure, but in a normal year it wouldn't even be a candidate. Yamada vs. Hase on Feb. 4 in Osaka is the match most have mentioned as a match of the year more than any other. It was a great match, but I didn't get anything extra special out of it. Dump Matsumoto's retirement matches had impact and were well-watched, but don't qualify as classics. The only "classic" match of this year, with the great impact, that everyone saw, was Ric Flair vs. Sting from Clash of Champions. There have been complaints about the slow start and the like, but after talking with people who have wrestled 45 minutes and understand the psychology of keeping an audience for that length of time, then reviewing the match, it was nearly perfect. There was only one spot, at 17 minutes, where they were in danger of blowing the match. Jumbo Tsuruta vs. Tiger Mask on March 9 in Yokohama had the greatest five minute spurt, but the first five minutes were restholds. The best girls match I've seen was Chigusa Nagayo's title defense against Yukari Omori--a 35 minute bloodbath, but I guess I'm used to better World title matches from the girls. I've got to mention an April 2 match from Mexico with Pirata Morgan & Hombre Bala & El Verdugo vs. Atlantis & El Azteca & Ringo Mendoza. As usual with Mexico, the work and psychology are above my head, and the crowd reaction is nil (although this match had more heat than any Mexican bout I've seen in a long time). However, some of the spots Atlantis and Morgan did are so unbelievable that I defy ANYONE not to enjoy this match. Some Ted DiBiase vs. Randy Savage matches have been good, the best being the SNME match from Nashville, but if you watch a good Japan match immediately after one of their matches, you'll see a difference in quality. Owen Hart vs. Makhan Singh on May 6 in Calgary was a great one-man show by Owen, but not a match of the year. Hiro Hase vs. Nobuhiko Takada on May 11 in Nagoya was the best match from a technical standpoint. But my pick for match of the year thus far is the 40 minute match with The Fantastics vs. Midnight Express from Chattanooga where the titles changed hands. I liked the unique finish. The match had unique spots and it was action from bell-to-bell. This wouldn't be match of the year in other years, but so far this year, it has my pick. Second goes to Flair vs. Sting and third to Hase vs. Takada with the Mexican match an honorable mention.

ROOKIE OF THE YEAR: There are certainly no Owen Harts or Bam Bam Bigelows this year, or even any Brian Pillmans. To be honest, there isn't one qualifier who comes to mind. My two candidates are guys who had experience prior to this year, but only with minor outfits. One is Scott Steiner, who is green but has potential, and worked for Bruiser's WWA (in fact was their World Champion) but has never worked full-time for a major office. The other is Steve Pritchard of SCW, but he worked last year for Deep South on a spot show basis. As far as pure rookies, the only one getting even a slight push is Akira Taue in Japan, and in my mind he's no candidate.

MANAGER OF THE YEAR: Let's start up the debate between Paul E. Dangerously and Jim Cornette. Dangerously has improved from last year, and he was good then. Cornette is overexposed, and has been doing basically the same act for years on the same stage. Still, Cornette stays fresh and creative, and may be the best performer in the business. Dangerously is dangerously close, however. Whoever is in third place (Jimmy Hart) is so far behind these two it isn't even worth commenting on.

BEST TV ANNOUNCER: Let's examine all of them. I won't pick the Japanese since even those who have seen them can't understand them, although I'm told the guy who does the announcing for the women's show is the best. In Calgary, Ed Whalen is horrible. He's not senile or out of touch like Rod Trongard, and he doesn't lie like Mark Lowrance, but he puts no heat into the matches and goes out of his way not to get the angles over. He bugs me so much because he is the weak link in the chain which prevents the best wrestling in North America from actually getting over as a quality promotion to the marks. Jim Davies fits into the same category. Vince McMahon is excellent if you can stand him. Gorilla Monsoon is pompous, but he doesn't ruin the show, either. Lord Al Hayes is embarrassing. Roger Kent wasn't as bad as I'd remembered him, which I guess says something about the announcers of today when Kent and Gordon Solie aren't bad anymore. Solie & Ron Fuller do a good job in USA wrestling. I enjoy Fuller since his commentary keeps Solie's non-thinking cliches from getting out of hand. Charlie Platt in Continental isn't good, but he doesn't ruin the show, either. Dave Brown is good in Memphis and Lance Russell is right at the top. Jim Ross is great on fall-by-fall and seems to be the hardest working announcer around. Tony Schiavone is fine, although he's weak at calling a match. Bob Caudle is underrated. David Crockett is everything everyone says he is. I'm picking Jim Ross first because I think Lance Russell's been made part of the act too much this year, but Russell is a close second. Vince McMahon gets third. On the bad side, there's a lot of competition, but Whalen is No. 1, followed by Trongard and Lowrance. Jesse Ventura is in a class by himself as a color commentator, although Ron Fuller isn't bad where Bobby Heenan is just too repetitive and predictable and Makhan Singh is funny, but not sharp enough to do a weekly show and stay fresh.

MOST CHARISMATIC: Hulk Hogan. Akira Maeda. Chigusa Nagayo. Elizabeth. Sting could be there, but he's not for reasons we've gone over.

BEST TECHNICAL WRESTLER: Hiro Hase is No. 1 by a country mile. There is nobody else in the business who has been able to rely basically on nothing but actual wrestling and can get as much heat in their matches. Owen Hart is close in ability, but has to rely on acrobatics to keep interest up. Hase does almost nothing but wrestling and a few flying moves. Hart gets second. Third would be Nobuhiko Takada.

BEST BRAWLER: For some reason people think of Ted DiBiase as a technical wrestler, but if you watch his matches you find very few actual moves. His matches with Randy Savage have been punch-kick-sell and nothing else. He is the best brawler going today. Ric Flair uses some technical moves, along with chops and overselling, but DiBiase is simply a brawler.

So is Randy Savage, who does two or three flying moves just to make him different, and spends the rest of the time brawling. Tully Blanchard & Arn Anderson are basically brawlers, who sell great. The Japanese version of Bruiser Brody has to be considered as well. My three picks are DiBiase, Eddie Gilbert and Brody.

BEST WRESTLING MOVE: I don't know what to call it, but Atlantis does this move where he stands on the top ropes and gives one opponent an arm-drag and dropkicks another all in the same move. The shooting-star press by Keiichi Yamada is second.

HARDEST WORKER: Samson Fuyuki

BIGGEST SHOCK OF THE YEAR: I'd almost like to say Jim Crockett's lack of business sense, but 1987 should be the example that this is nothing to be shocked about. I was shocked at how bad Wrestlemania was and how good the first Clash of the Champions was, and how quickly Crockett destroyed whatever gains were made on that day. I was shocked at how Inoki managed to kill off Riki Choshu, and shocked that the Japanese women lost so many key figures so quickly.

MOST DISGUSTING PROMOTIONAL TACTIC: Okay, I'm going to get flak for this one, but it was the Fritz Von Erich fake heart attack. I know that for a few weeks it got the promotion going a bit so it was successful. Lots of people have said that if Bill Watts was doing it that I'd be praising it. That is pure bull. First off, the only other fake heart attack angle, with Blackjack Mulligan, won this category. Second, this was even worse because they kept tying it into the deaths of David and Mike. It was like they were saying, look at all the tragedy this family has suffered and adding a fake tragedy to two terribly real tragedies. It would be disgusting putting a life-or-death situation (and making it more or less serious each week on TV depending upon whether the houses are up or down) for any promotion, but to do it with the Von Erichs was a lot worse. Using Magnum in that angle when he simply wasn't ready was very sad as well.

STRONGEST WRESTLER: Steve Williams

WORST WRESTLER: Tom Magee

WORST TAG TEAM: The Bolsheviks, only because the AWA hasn't come up with a full-time partner for Von Raschke.

WORST TV SHOW: Deep South Wrestling. Horrible matches, horrible commentary, horrible skits and horrible interviews.

WORST MANAGER: Mr. Fuji, but a few more weeks of Brother Love may make me change my tune. Paul Jones and Abdul Wizal aren't much, either. Oliver Humperdink is the most useless manager, however.

WORST MATCH OF THE YEAR: Hiroshi Wajima vs. Tom Magee. This was worse than Roddy Piper vs. Mr. T. The closest thing to a negative five star match I've seen in years. Anabolic Warrior vs. Hercules at Wrestlemania was bad, but not in the league with this rusty coat hanger job.

WORST FEUD: Nikita Koloff vs. Al Perez because it was hopeless to start with, didn't work, and in their infinite wisdom, they continued to waste valuable TV time pushing it. Anabolic Warrior vs. Hercules and Andre vs. Duggan were actually worse in the ring but atleast somebody cared. Midlife Rider vs. Tully Blanchard was a flop like one I've never seen before since the Giant Machine, in fact, dating back a lot farther than that. Road Warriors vs. Powers of Pain never worked like it should have, but given the four involved, it shouldn't be that surprising. Junkfood Dog vs. Ron Bass is bad, so is Greg Valentine vs. George Steele, but neither had the investment of time given to them like Nikita and Perez.

WORST ON INTERVIEWS: Steve Williams. He's become the standard by which all other illiterates are judged.

WORST PROMOTION: As far as fulfilling its potential, without question it's the NWA. However, after seeing an AWA card live, they are getting the nod. They have simply an amazing collection of bad wrestlers, the likes of which I've never seen before, and throw in bad announcing, bad booking and no crowds, and you've got an easy pick.

BEST BOOKER: Vince McMahon, although Eddie Gilbert could be the winner by the end of the year.

One more comment on the worst promotional tactic. The actual angle itself where the Freebirds beat up Fritz was tremendous and realistic and what a great angle should be. The problem I have with it is the way it was played on TV over the next few weeks with them saying that it's touch and go if Fritz would live through the night. That is too far for everyone to take an angle. Sure, we've all seen wrestlers blinded on a regular basis in World Class, but there is a limit and hinting at death is crossing that line. The fact that it was the Von Erichs, who used legitimate deaths of David and Mike in attempts to sell wrestling tickets in the past made this angle tragic. ***

THE BEST OF THE QUOTEBOOK
Featuring Jesse Ventura

"It's better to be lucky than good."

(Concerning Cheryl Roberts): "She's a tramp."

"I'm thinking McMahon. You oughta' try it sometime."

(Concerning Hillbilly Jim): "Can you imagine what might nest in that beard?"

(To Vince McMahon): "Is that how you eat snake-with mustard?"

"No sense, makes sense."

(Concerning Bam Bam Bigelow): "He's not a sight for sore eyes."

(Concerning The Honkeytonk Man): "What the guy lacks in ability he makes up for in sheer luck."

(Concerning Koko B. Ware): "You know, he inherited his singing ability from his grandfather, Buckwheat."

"Anyone can have a good body but you're born with your face."

"I can't even hear myself think, it's so loud."

(To Vince McMahon): "Keep your mind on wrestling for a change. If you need to look at girls, go get a Playboy."

(Concerning Rick Rude's day of birth): "He was so tough, he slapped the doctor and took a cab home."

(To Demolition): "You're two of the best dressed men I've ever seen."

"Keep Matilda away from the ringposts!"

(To Vince McMahon): "You ain't never done nothin' athletic in your life except tie your shoes, and I noticed you're wearing velcros now."

"The women were jumping all over me trying to rip my clothes off."

"I don't deal in comments. I deal in facts."

"It's not how you play the game, it's whether you win or lose."

"Close only counts in horseshoes and hand grenades."

"It's not me who calls me "The Body", it's the world that calls me "The Body"."

"I don't know if Mene Gene was holding a microphone or a vibrator."

"I had to give Vannah the bad news that I won't be going out with her after Wrestlemania, and that was bad news."

(To Vince McMahon): "You're smarter than you look, McMahon."

(Concerning Rick Rude): "He's checkin' out the merchandise. I love it!"

(Concerning Bam Bam Bigelow): "He definitely has a face only a mother could love."

(Concerning Matilda): "She's so fat, her legs almost don't touch the ground."

"You're worse than Watergate, Monsoon."

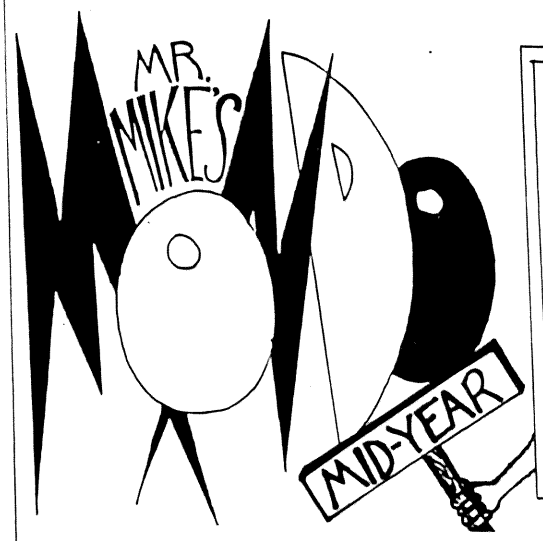
"How come you don't believe everything I tell you, Monsoon."

(Concerning Hacksaw Duggan): "This guy might be a good wrestler, but when it comes to brains, he's got a ten-cent brain."

(Concerning Rick Rude): "He loves those women with rings, don't he?"

"Some guy wanted a "Rude Awakening". That character, Patterson's not in the building, is he?"

"This is the land of the brave and the home of Ventura."



MEMO TO: Wade Keller
SUBJECT: Immediate Psychiatric Attention

Oops! It's too late kid, 'cause here comes... Mr. Mikes Mondo Mid-Year Mess.

* *

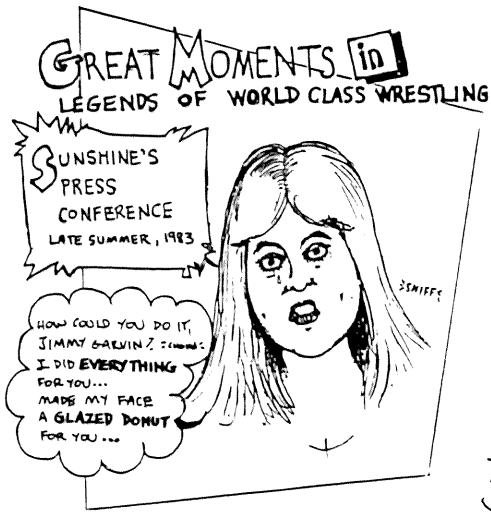
Greetings fellow grapple geeks! How about a mid-year skien from the inane brain of the sophomore Minnesota Mat Moron, Mr. Mike? It wasn't my idea, but we've long known that we grow 'em pretty thick up here in the cold climes. Can you believe there's some restless native desperate enough to solicit this sicko scribe? It's true! So here we go with more Mondo-Observo screams of consciousness. Why? Because we don't like you !

MONDO THOUGHTS ON THE AWA

Well, that's about all I have to say... 'Cause being an AWA wrestling fan in Minna-slowda these days is about as interesting as, well... well there just is no appropriate simile to convey the total disassociation one feels. There isn't much going on. The wrestlers seem to exist only in the TV ether. The "talent" line-up is as unstable as a quantum particle, and while I've never been one not to complain, it's so beyond pointless to bitch about the way of things. For some local die-hard loyalists, there's solace in giving these putzes points for persistence. Yea, well that there still is an AWA entity despite all logic to the contrary, is a testament to someone and something, however, I doubt there exists a single motive worthy of praise. Why is there still an AWA promoted by Verne Gagne? (one could easily insert Kansas City & Bob Giegel, World Class & Fritz Von Worthless, or several other equally contemptible combos with equal validity) Why indeed? Is it due to a resolute conviction to remain true to long held wrestling principles? Or is it unrelenting brain rigor-mortis? Maybe the old boys are just too stupid to figure out anything else to do, and as long as there are equally retarded wretches willing to work the cards for the inevitable stall and stiff... well why not?

"NOBLESSE OBLIGE"

So, why nitpick the nitwits? Should we continue to critique the hopless charade, or give 'em points for trying in what's turning out to be an eternal game of horseshoes?

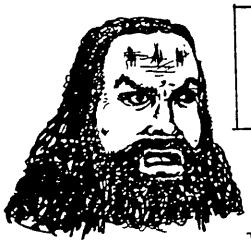

GREAT MOMENTS in
LEGENDS OF WORLD CLASS WRESTLING:
SUNSHINE'S PRESS CONFERENCE
LATE SUMMER, 1983
SNIFF!
HOW COULD YOU DO IT, JIMMY GARVIN? I DID EVERYTHING FOR YOU... MADE MY FACE A GLAZED DONUT FOR YOU...

Yeah, right. I'll give 'em credit, all right: How they've managed to maintain a straight face and a semblance of self-respect amidst their weekly disasters is impressive indeed. Who would of guessed: They're still the major leagues! Still present the greatest names in wrestling! Is home to that awesome technician, Ladies World Champ, Medusa Macelli! "Of course she's great, she is the world champion" (although I'll readily admit the Bozo Braintrust does attempt to keep her out of actual wrestling matches except when absolutely unavoidable); gives us great "Mat Classic" film clips every week from major arenas all over the world! ((This one's my favorite. Each week, that fabulous fibber Greg Gagme intros some alleged classic clip, with the appropriate historical context and background, from a different major city site: Chicago, Milwaukee, Denver, Oakland, Omaha, Winnipeg, Salt Lake City, even St. Paul, all key spots in an AWA that once was. Only one thing: eight out of ten times, they're clips from just St. Paul! Why the lie? To maintain a facade of fecundity? Or is it just they're too stupid to notice??))

Their tri-weekly TV tapings continue to dicover new definitions of natural disasters. Since it's problematical who's going to be there from taping to taping, we faithful followers don't get too bogged down with continuity. Most of the "name" talent that shows up at any given taping better be viewed a guest appearance. There may be some "new faces" who actually appeared two in a row! But has any piece of talent not under permanent apparent exile ever made three? How 'bout The Rock & Roll Express? I think we had "Rock" one time and "Roll" another, and maybe them together twice, or was it once? I know Manny Fernandez made at least one taping (I just watched it last night) in June, but did he make a second? (That's Manny Fernandez, the former NFL Football great, according to that terminal moron, Rod Trongard. Well, yeah Rod. It is the same name anyway, you incredible idiot.) Anyway, you get my point, which is, I think that AWA stands for Absolutely Without Angles, and considering the attempted Baron Von Raschke vs. Soldat Ustinov blood feud, it's probably for the best.

NOT ONLY AM I - 'FUNKY AS A MON-KAY"...
I'M JERKY AS A TURKEY -- ZIPPO AS A HIPPO -- PALE AS A WHALE -- FLATULENT AS AN ELEPHANT - A TURD LIKE A BIRD - AS UNBELIEVABLY GROSS AND DISGUSTING AS AN...
AND OBTUSE AS A MOOSE... OBESE AS SOME GEESE... ROUND AS A HOOND... FAT AS A RAT...

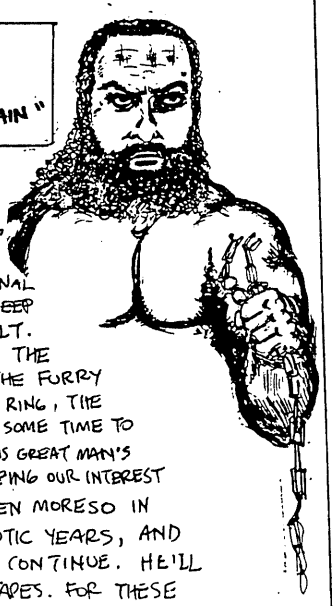
Ah, well, the above rave gives much more thought and attention to our local losers than any sane person would allow. In the best Minnesota-stubborn-Swede tradition, Verne Gagme has clearly shown there are no limits to the depths he'll excavate to in order to maintain the facade of a growing concern. About the only positive note is that the AWA World Title Belt is still paid lip-service by a surprising number of unaffiliated booking offices (highly ironic in fact, it's probably got more booking offices now than ever in the past. Just goes to show how truly eviscerated the structures of the business have become). Never mind that most of them mention the AWA due to default: It's the growing number of smaller, southern circuits disenfranchised by the JCP NWA. And even though I had considered Curt Hennig the only conceivable available individual worthy of holding the title, if they had had to do a switch, they couldn't do any better than use Jerry Lawler. Fact is, Lawler's win, and the way it was treated in his Memphis hometown, actually added a little stature to the moribund mantle. Best of all, it has avoided what I live in fear as being inevitable- giving the World Title to that despicable little dauphin, Greg Gagme.



BRUISER BRODY

1946 - 1988

"IT WILL NEVER BE QUITE THE SAME AGAIN"



THE SHOCK OF UNEXPECTED DEATHS HAS BECOME ALL TO COMMON IN PRO WRESTLING THESE PAST FEW YEARS, AND NONE ARE RECEIVED LIGHTLY. UPON HEARING OF THE SENSELESS, CRIMINAL DEMISE OF BRUISER BRODY HOWEVER, THE SENSE OF DEEP **PERSONAL** LOSS WAS FOR THE FIRST TIME KEENLY FELT. FEW WRESTLERS HAVE TOUCHED THE ARDENT FAN AS THE AMAZING **BB** DID, AND THE CLOSER ONE FOLLOWED THE FURRY BOOTED BEHEMOTH, BOTH IN AND ESPECIALLY OUT OF THE RING, THE MORE THE ADMIRATION TURNED TO OPEN AWE. WE'LL TAKE SOME TIME TO MORE FULLY ARTICULATE OUR THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS ABOUT THIS GREAT MAN'S LIFE AND DEATH, BUT BRODY WAS A KEY REASON FOR DEVELOPING OUR INTEREST OF SERIOUSLY FOLLOWING PROFESSIONAL WRESTLING. EVEN MORESO IN MAINTAINING OUR INTEREST THESE PAST RECENT CHAOTIC YEARS, AND HIS ABSENCE WILL FOREVER CHANGE HOW WE WILL CONTINUE. HE'LL FOREVER REMAIN IN OUR HEARTS AND ON OUR VIDEOTAPES. FOR THESE REASONS, THANKFULLY, THE BARKING WILL NEVER BE STOPPED. GOODBYE.

THE FOUR HORSE'S ASS MEN

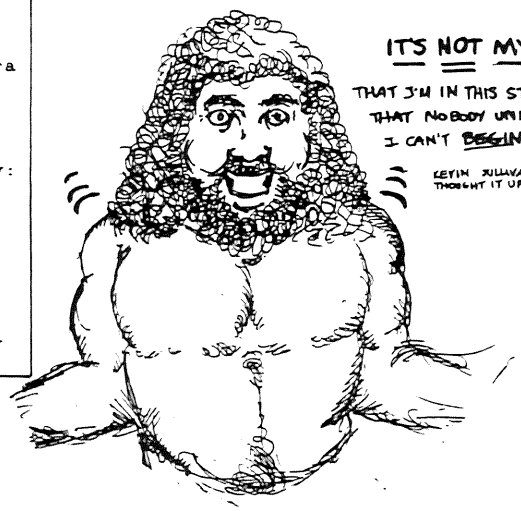
Since the AWA persists like a virulent strain, and my morbid curiosity precludes total avoidance, we spend our time in search of the rare nugget of wrestling truth. It's a pretty bleak search, what with Gagne's talent pool populated with recent Eddie Sharkey Student Slugs. (And is ol' Ed slipping? He used to get his boys work with more upwardly mobile circuits. I guess that's it: Most of the stiffs have been placed, like Terry Stiffpinski, that Power of Pain-to-Watch Warlord. Those who remain are increasingly employed by the now receptive AWA. Prime recent example is Ricky Rice, a singularly underwhelming worker is suddenly thrust into a Midnight Rocker-like niche along with John Paul, who may or may not have a third name. I seem to recall Ricky teaming with Derrick Dukes while still under the Sharkey learn why don't you earn plan. Is there some reason Dukes isn't qualified to team with Ricky Rice <u>now</u>??) Even when the aforementioned Hennig or Lawler are around, there just aren't any recent opponents outside of each other. Probably the only other bright spot are the tag team champs, half of them anyway. As I still think Pat Tanaka is the best thing going under five foot five. Probably the best TV action they've had in <u>months</u> were when Tanaka was in there against Mando Guerrero. Of course, knowing it leads to nothing sorta' takes the edge off, but hey, I'm grateful for the edge.

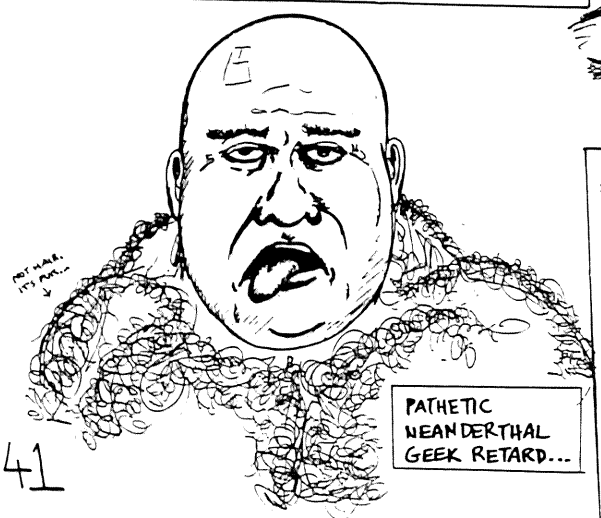
Anything else to say about the A..W....A? It's a curiosity, that's for sure. In Verne's own version of Title Nine, continued attention is given to the ladies (from all available evidence, the noun <u>lady wrestlers</u> does not apply), and in the process, any subjective distinction between the kinda' wrestling the AWA is (was) and the kind that David McLanels POWW (which technically should be "Powerful of Women Wrestling"), should it not?)is, is forever put asunder. I always <u>thought</u> that champ Micelli was, at best, of POWW/GLOW caliber. Certainly looks the part, but she's far worse than even their high standards. Since, however, Medusa does not appear handicapped by any type of morality or dignity, she'll obviously go far. In fact, you might say, she'll go down as one of the best, or vise versa.

A MONDO LOOK AT VARIOUS PROMOTIONS

What's the best promotion at present? My first choice is from Japan: The UWF on their second incarnation, the UWF has through the aura of Akira Maeda achieved what would be ridiculously out of the question in this country: The perception by the public as a legit sport. That's nutty, of course, but they're exploiting this opportunity brilliantly: Running one show a month in a big city, assuring at least for the present, record setting sell-outs with gates approaching a half-million bucks US which is who knows how many yen? (just not as many as it used to be).

When restricting consideration to the USA only, the best promotion may as well be: <u>CWF</u>, the former Continental, part of Alabama entity. Since its recent fission of itself and the USA


IT'S NOT MY FAULT!!
THAT I'M IN THIS STUPID ANGLE THAT NOBODY UNDERSTANDS AND I CAN'T BEGIN TO EXPLAIN...
KEVIN SULLIVAN THOUGHT IT UP!



circuit under the Fuller auspice, the group has made many right moves. And being on the FNN cable channel which I'm able to watch and actually do, I can honestly say, the show is a watchable and entertaining hour. Reason for it all largely rests on the arrival of booker Eddie Gilbert, although there was and is a surprisingly able pool of talent, probably the best of any small circuit in the country. Austin Idol, Jerry Stubs, Tom Pritchard, Ken Wayne, Danny Davis, and the "Dirty White Boy" are all proven entertainers. Our admiration is unrestrained for Mr. Eddie, and doubly so for his spicy spouse. On the stick, in the ring, or behind the scenes, EG is an enormous talent. And if that isn't enough, his vocal impersonations are of Las Vagas lounge act level. ***

WHAT THE WRESTLING WORLD IS COMING TO

The wrestling world is changing. There is no doubt about that. In the past there was one promotion in an area. If local fans wanted to see wrestling, they would go to the monthly or weekly cards at the local or major arena. Ever since the expansion of the WWF, the NWA, and countless others who weren't as successful, the fans can now nit-pick about their wrestling. They have now discovered that many styles of wrestling exist. They have become more choosy and want, what in their mind, is the best of all the leagues. Fans want the glitz and professionalism of Titan, the action and excitement of the NWA, the hometown feeling of Memphis, and the nostalgia of the AWA. No league can form to fit every fan's idea of an ideal promotion.

The mainstream fan is confused by all the names, and if he doesn't see a bunch of familiar names on a card, he won't go. If the title isn't on the line, he won't go. If there isn't any unique match on the card, he won't go. The local cards these days feature little more than a gathering of past and future TV main events. When one can see five Fantastics-Midnight Express matches in one's own home, why go to the arena to see the same match. It's been said thousands of times, but overexposure is definitely a problem.

However, the bulk of tomorrow's wrestling dollar is not the house gates. The bulk of the wrestling dollar will be the money made off of television advertising revenue and pay per view money. And why not? Pay per view is great! A whole family or large group of friends can now afford to see a great wrestling event. There is no problem with parking. There is no problem with transportation. There is no line for tickets. There is no line for the restroom. It has "all the comforts of home".

On the promoters' side. He only has one show that he has to put on. The boys only have to "put out" hard on this one night, and because of this the matches will invariably be better. He can do a major angle just once and have everyone see it at the same time. The wrestlers don't have to travel around the world for the whole world to see them live. And there is still the arena crowd, producing souvenir sales, concessions, "heat", and the live gate. Pay per view definitely has advantages.

But even with all of the television specials, pay per view events, and the regular television shows, many fans are crying out for live arena cards. The AWA office receives endless phone calls from people wondering when they are going to put on a show in the Twin Cities again. There will always be a demand to see wrestling in person at the arenas. Pay per view will never alleviate that desire.

What is the wrestling world coming to? There are still many local promotions. Some thriving. Some dying. The CWA, IWA, PWA, CWF, PNW, OWF, WCWA, and Windy City are all "local" promotions with little interest in going world-wide. Their immediate goal is not competing with Titan and Crockett. They want to be successful in their area and cater to the local fans. Windy City Wrestling caters to Chicago fans. World Class cater to what Texas fans want. Memphis (CWA) gives the fans in Memphis what they want. The WWF and NWA can't transform nightly for each city it travels to. Fans in different areas react very differently from each other. The local promotions can focus on what works in their city.

A seventies-like alliance seems to be forming. Cooperation seems to be occurring once again between the local promotions. CWF, CWA, WCWA, WWA, PNW, and the AWA seem to be forming some type of alliance. Jerry Lawler has made appearances in many of these areas as the "AWA World Champion". This reminds one of the days when the NWA World Champion would from time to time make appearances in each territory. The local promotions top name would get the title shot against the champ, and the fans would go to see this. The World Champion appearing in their city was a big deal. These days, the "World Champion" is "The Federation's Champion". The title means little. Whether the travelling World Champion method will work with fans of today is the question. Jerry Lawler is the most recent test.

A lot of people are bitter about the state of wrestling today. They have either lost interest completely or are always talking about "the good old days" and how much better things were then for wrestling. The fact is, the world is constantly changing in every aspect. The world of wrestling is no different. When someone becomes of a fan of this sport, they are attracted to the wrestling scene of that particular time. As years go by and the scene changes, some can either adapt to the new look, or simply continue to enjoy pro wrestling for what it still is, entertainment. For the many fans turned off by the changing of the business, the same number of new fans are usually created. Hopefully these fans who are bitter about the business will also realize that hindsight is most often more optimistic than foresight.

The people running wrestling today won't be in a few years. One of these days, the office workers like Ray Stevens, Pat Paterson, Blackjack Lanza, Wahoo McDaniel, Greg Gagne, Verne Gagne, Dusty Rhodes, etc, will dissolve and make room for the "new breed of promoters", like Paul E. Dangerously, Eddie Gilbert, Sammy DiCero, and others not yet established. They are the guys who will decide the destiny of pro wrestling. When the balance of power shifts to the younger promoters, the good ol' days won't be in the past; the good ol' days will be part of the future. If that's not enough to keep today's fan interested in wrestling, I don't know what is.

What is the wrestling world coming to? Time is the only accurate answer to that question.

-Wade Keller ***

THE BEST OF THE QUOTEBOOK

Ted DiBiase to Mene Gene: "If I wanted your opinion, I'd buy it!"

Nord the Barbarian: "No credit? We don't care! No down payment? We still don't care! Don't make your payments? Then we care!"

Curt Hennig: "You know, people always ask me if I'm a good guy or a bad guy. Well, the truth is, I'm a great guy!"

Jake Roberts: "When you deal with "The Snake", don't bet your life, or you'll be dead in the morning."

Nick Bockwinkel to Larry Zbyszko: "Don't blame others for what goes wrong in your life. Just blame me."

Rod Trongard on Curt Hennig: "His future is all still ahead of him."

Someone from Somewhere: "Build a system that even a fool can use, and only a fool will want to use it."

Jimmy Hart: "The best shot is a cheap shot."

Downtown Bruno concerning Doug Furnass: "He calls himself the strongest man in professional wrestling. Yea, but body odor ain't everything in pro wrestling."

Someone from Somewhere: "Logic is a systematic method of coming to the wrong conclusion with confidence."

Larry Zbyszko: "Let me tell you about attitude, because I've got a real bad one."

Slick concerning One Man Gang: "He's so big that every time he steps on a scale it reads 'to be continued'."

Paul Ellering: "Life is a banquet in which most fools starve." ***